

**FAITH MENTOR: MEDIATING GOD'S GRACE THROUGH  
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

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Sondra Higgins Matthaei  
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*This dissertation, written by*

Sondra Higgins Matthaei

*under the direction of her Faculty Committee,  
and approved by its members, has been presented  
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of  
Theology at Claremont in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

*Faculty Committee*

Mary Elizabeth Moore  
Chairman  
James Verheyden  
J. Edwin Fetter

Date April 14, 1989

Allen J. Moore

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## **Abstract**

### **Faith Mentor: Mediating God's Grace Through Interpersonal Relationships**

**Sondra Higgins Matthaei**

A personal conviction that the grace of God is mediated through faith-mentoring led to the exploration of two questions: How do interpersonal relationships influence a person's growth in faith? How can a faith community be more intentional about its nurture of these relationships? Each of the first four chapters in this book utilizes a different approach to research on faith-mentoring. Chapter 1 explores the nature of nurturing relationships described in the literature. Interview data about the influence of significant relationships is collected and analyzed using Grounded Theory in Chapter 2. Insights from psychoanalytic theory interpret the results of the empirical research in Chapter 3. And Chapter 4 is a historical case study of two of John Wesley's relationships prior to his conversion at Aldersgate. A concept of mentoring evolves from each research chapter. The interrelationship of these concepts serves as the groundwork for a discussion of faith-mentoring in Chapter 5. Dimensions and metaphors of faith-mentoring, as well as the role of a faith community are discussed in the final chapter.

Research revealed three forms of influential relationships: family, helping professional, and friend. Respondents reported that each relationship influenced their relational growth, identity definition, and development of

interpersonal and vocational skills. Six roles expected of influential persons were mirroring, modeling, guiding, being, caring-accepting and expanding-exposing. Significant gender differences were found in role expectations: relational mentoring expected of women and vocational mentoring expected of men.

The results of the four approaches to research were drawn into a definition of faith mentor: a co-creator with God who, as a living representative of God's grace, participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons. Roles of a faith mentor include guide, model, guarantor, and mediator. Three dimensions of faith-mentoring are relational, incarnational, and contextual.

Any person can be a faith mentor. A continuum of faith-mentoring relationships is possible ranging from a momentary meeting to an intentional relationship focusing on a person's spiritual growth. A variety of faith mentors are needed throughout a person's life. Through faith-mentoring, all persons are affirmed for their contribution to the creation of new life, and a faith community is renewed.

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There are no words  
for thank you  
--only colors.

The damp, deep brown  
of plowed fields vulnerable for planting;  
brilliant greens divulging tender growth;  
clear blues and rain-sodden grays of the sky;  
life-giving sunlight  
bringing birth.  
For those who shared generously of themselves  
in co-creating the new life represented here,  
my heartfelt gratitude:

Mary Elizabeth Moore

Committee Members - Teachers and Friends - Family

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## CHAPTER 1

### A Guide in the Wilderness

#### Introduction

Every act of authentic self-disclosure makes one life a gift to the becoming of another.

Every act of accurate empathic understanding enhances the listener's spirit.

Every act of responsible challenge in the spirit of empathy is an invitation to an increase in stature.

Every act of non-defensive exploration in response<sup>1</sup> to challenge reflects a commitment to a life of larger dimensions.

In the summer of 1979 I was certain I would never return to my vocation. What I thought had been, wasn't and would never be. I had lost my way. The image of being smothered seemed appropriate to my predicament. I felt the despair and the anger that comes from seeming to have no way out.

As I've thought about the experiences of that year, I've been struck by the absurdity of the fact that I am still in ministry. During that summer I was in the midst of a personal and spiritual crisis. My feelings were numbed; any confidence in my sense of judgment was nonexistent. I had lost my way in the wilderness. Into this wilderness came a friend who encouraged me to walk through the pain and to remain in ministry during my pilgrimage. This

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, Community of Faith: Models and Strategies for Developing Christian Communities (New York: Seabury, 1982), 138-139.

friend held the vision of my identity as minister until I could once again reclaim it.

Each person is on a pilgrimage through life. It is a journey with many turning points on the way -- challenges, joys, and opportunities for growth. The Apostle Paul's conversion can serve as a paradigm for the turning points on one's faith journey. Even before he was blinded in his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded to the truth of God in his life.<sup>2</sup> We, too, can be blind to God's truth and lose our sense of direction. Sometimes we are blinded by the pain of broken relationships, or by the guilt from our part in the breaking. Or is it our self-centeredness and insensitivity that keeps us from finding our way? For many of us it is our arrogance in thinking we have the answers and can be self-sufficient. More than one time on our journeys we will lose sight of the path and wander aimlessly among the trees. Then God breaks into our awareness to illuminate the path ahead, and we once again find our direction.

Somehow during those traumatic months in my life, God worked through my friend. I believe my friend's role was not unlike that of Ananias, sent by God to minister to Saul. Ananias trusted God enough to express his reluctance to go to Saul, the persecutor of Christians. But God insisted and Ananias went. He put his hands on Saul's head and delivered the message: "Brother Saul, the Lord has sent me -- Jesus himself, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. He sent me so you might see again and be

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 9:3-4, TEV.

**filled with the Holy Spirit."**<sup>3</sup> A healing touch and a brief message were the heart of Ananias' mission. This encounter opened Saul's eyes to the reality of what had happened to him and changed his life forever. Ananias baptized Saul, welcoming him into the Christian community as his brother Paul.

Ananias served as guide, interpreter, and healer at a turning point in the life of Paul. At a similar point in my life, a friend helped me think through my alternatives and expressed his faith that God's direction would come in the choices I had to make. Out of this experience has grown a personal conviction that interpersonal relationships are one source for the mediation of God's grace.

Two aspects of this conviction call for consideration here: (1) How do interpersonal relationships influence a person's growth in faith? and (2) How can a faith community be more intentional about its support and nurture of these relationships? While recognizing that persons are influenced in many ways during their growth in faith, the scope of this study is limited to the influence of face-to-face relationships. A variety of sources is used to explore this topic including business, educational, and psychoanalytic literature, an empirical research project, and a historical case study.

### Thesis

The thesis is that growth in faith is influenced by interpersonal relationships. The hypotheses which guide the entire work are that persons can be influenced by their relationships in the area of faith; that the pilgrimage of faith is unique to each individual, but that shared patterns of

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 9:16, TEV (boldface added).

faith mediation; that contemporary research can provide insight and direction for developing metaphors of faith mediation can be identified; and that historical material can inform and critique contemporary discussions of the role of significant relationships in faith formation.

In exploring the thesis, four approaches to research will be utilized. The first approach, discussed in Chapter 1, is to explore the nature of nurturing relationships described in the literature: coach, guarantor, master (apprentice), mentor, spiritual director, and sponsor. A second approach is to collect and analyze interview data focusing on how persons' lives are influenced by significant relationships (Chapter 2). Insights from psychoanalytic theory are used to interpret influential relationships in the third approach (Chapter 3). The fourth approach is a historical case study of the impact of two of John Wesley's relationships on his heartwarming at Aldersgate (Chapter 4). A concept of mentoring evolves from the results of each approach to research. The interrelationship of these concepts of mentoring serves as the groundwork for a discussion of faith-mentoring in Chapter 5. Dimensions and metaphors of faith-mentoring, as well as the role of a faith community are discussed in the final chapter.

Guidance for future development of faith-mentoring can come through the four approaches to research. Any new insights regarding interpersonal relationships and their effect on a person's growth in faith will contribute to faith-mentoring. The hope is that mediating the faith through interpersonal relationships will become an intentional practice of ministry by a faith community. The purpose of this book as a whole is to recover a consciousness of the power of God at work in relationships by developing the practice of faith-mentoring as a vehicle for mediating God's grace across time and space.

The challenge is to create a clear vision of faith-mentoring so that the practice of ministry may be enhanced.<sup>4</sup> The process of creating the vision is like that of assembling a picture puzzle. Once each piece is placed in appropriate relationship to the other pieces, the whole picture is revealed. Each piece brings its own color and texture to the whole. The picture of the multi-dimensional nature of faith-mentoring to be assembled here cannot be described prior to this study, but will emerge from the results of the research described in this work.

### Forms of Nurturing Relationships

The first piece of the puzzle is an exploration of the nature of nurturing relationships described in the literature: coach, guarantor, master (apprentice), mentor, spiritual director, sponsor. Each form of influential relationship will be reviewed in light of its development in the literature. Materials for this study come from educational, psychological, and religious sources.

#### Coach

For Anselm Strauss, to be part of an ongoing group or social structure means that there are passages from status to status, e.g. from childhood to adolescence or from adolescence to adulthood. Strauss discussed the importance of the role of coach in this movement from status to status. In the coaching relationship, one person closely models her or his life after that

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<sup>4</sup> Because this work is attempting to broaden the usage of the term mentor, inclusive language will be used in all paraphrased material in this work. Exclusive language in direct quotations will not be changed, but [sic] will be used the first time exclusive language appears in each quotation to remind the reader of the inclusive nature of this work.



of another. A coach teaches another person the skills needed and provides some direction.<sup>5</sup> The process of the coaching relationship includes: (1) Prescriptions for action - The coach plans the step-by-step preparation for the expected behavior in the next status. (2) A schedule of movement - Just as one moves to the next grade in school when certain requirements have been met, the coach monitors growth so that a person moves to the next status in an appropriate amount of time. (3) A challenge to relinquish the old ways of doing things - While persons are learning new ways of doing and being, the coach encourages them to leave the old ways behind. (4) An accusation in the face of backsliding - By confronting persons with the reappearance of old habits, the coach enhances the consciousness of the growth process.<sup>6</sup> These accusations of backsliding may lead first to conflict and then to a separation in the relationship. Reconciliation in the relationship usually marks a turning point in the person's growth.

#### Guarantor

Ross Snyder described the role of guarantor as crucial for a relational ministry with young people. The guarantor becomes a "reference point of identity" for youth and young adults. A guarantor needs to be a person who trusts and can be trusted, a person of expectation and vision.<sup>7</sup> The relationship begins with recognition, the affirmation that comes when the

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<sup>5</sup> Anselm L. Strauss, Masks and Mirrors (Mill Valley, Ca: Sociology Press, 1969), 110-112.

<sup>6</sup> Strauss, 113-114.

<sup>7</sup> Ross Snyder, Ministry of Meaning (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1965), 138.

guarantor notices the young person. An intimacy in which individual boundaries remain distinct follows. The guarantor's role is to see potential in the other and to provide opportunities which awaken that possibility. The guarantor can "sense us at the point of our life vocation" and "helps us to understand ourselves."<sup>8</sup> Throughout the relationship the guarantor shares her or his own experiences at appropriate times.

Snyder defined the qualities needed for the guarantor role: guarantors are usually older and have entree into a specific situation; guarantors are a working model of the next step; guarantors are adults who are "living the becoming future now"; and guarantors are trying to live out their relationship with God authentically.<sup>9</sup>

William Myers also described guarantors in youth ministry as faithing adults who incarnate God's love in appropriate ways:

A guarantor is someone who is appropriately anchored in adulthood but who will walk with youth on their journey. Guarantors share the burden of the journey, help read the road maps and offer encouragement. They incarnate "adulthood" in ways that encourage young people to grow. In this way they "guarantee" the fact that adulthood will be a good place to be.<sup>10</sup>

David Ng believed that Jesus Christ is the example of a perfect guarantor, the model for a faithful Christian life.<sup>11</sup> Christ, as the ultimate gift of love, embodies the fullness of life and communicates through the witness of his life and ministry that all of life is sacred.

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<sup>8</sup> Snyder, 138-140.

<sup>9</sup> Snyder, 140-141.

<sup>10</sup> William Myers, Theological Themes of Youth Ministry (New York: Pilgrim, 1987), 35.

<sup>11</sup> David Ng, Youth in the Community of Disciples (Valley Forge: Judson, 1981), 50.

### Master (Apprentice)

In colonial America, the goal of education was the "comprehensive formation of character" to equip a person for responsible public life.<sup>12</sup> The most characteristic method of ministerial training in the eighteenth century was apprenticeship.<sup>13</sup> A local church pastor would serve as the instructor or tutor for one or more theological students who were reading divinity:

reading divinity is better understood not as a single institution but rather as the common name for a collection of educational tasks capable of being performed by individual persons and intended to insure ecclesiastical guidance for ministerial candidates.<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes a student would live with the pastor as an apprentice in the practical aspects of ministry. The pastor would direct the course of studies, supervise the practice of ministerial functions, and serve as sponsor of the candidate for ordination.<sup>15</sup> Problems of accountability finally led to the demise of apprenticeship and to greater standardization of ministerial education in the seminaries.

More recently, William Willimon called for a return to "apprenticeship in the art of discipleship."<sup>16</sup> The church should once again concern itself with formation, inducting persons into the faith. Since persons are shaped through

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<sup>12</sup> W. Clark Gilpin, "The Seminary Ideal in American Protestant Ministerial Education, 1700-1808," Theological Education 20, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 85.

<sup>13</sup> Gilpin, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Gilpin, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Gilpin, 87-88.

<sup>16</sup> William H. Willimon, "Making Christians in a Secular World," Christian Century 103, no. 31 (October 22, 1986): 916.

their interactions with one another, Willimon challenged the church to be intentional about Christianity as a way of life.

Our youth must come to see themselves in a sort of master-apprentice relationship with older Christians, in which the young look over the shoulders of those who are attempting to be Christian in today's world. Christian education should provide opportunities for developing believers to model their lives upon those of developed believers . . . . Christian development is best understood . . . as apprenticeship in the art of discipleship.<sup>17</sup>

Willimon brought this idea to life in a later article describing a confirmation class in a local church.<sup>18</sup> Young persons were matched with older Christian guides. The pairs worked their way through a series of learning activities which focused on various aspects of the Christian life, e.g. Bible study, community service, attending worship, and others. Books, films, and lectures became secondary to "young Christians in close proximity with older Christians -- 'mentors' who invite these younger Christians to look over their shoulders as they both attempt to live as Christians."<sup>19</sup> For Willimon, persons who serve as role models are more important in Christian formation than curriculum or classrooms. The focus becomes the way the members of the Christian community live their life together.

### Mentor

The origin of the term mentor is traced back to the goddess Athene who came to Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, in the guise of Odysseus' boyhood

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<sup>17</sup> Willimon, "Making Christians," 916.

<sup>18</sup> William H. Willimon, "Taking Confirmation Out of the Classroom," Christian Century 105, no. 9 (March 16, 1988): 271-272.

<sup>19</sup> Willimon, "Taking Confirmation," 271.

friend, Mentor.<sup>20</sup> Odysseus said of the paradoxical Athene, "She always stands beside me in all my tasks and always remembers me wherever I go."<sup>21</sup>

Athene was the daughter of Metis and Zeus. She was the warrior goddess who fought on the side of the Achaeans against the Trojans. But Athene also applied her ingenuity in seeking peace. She represents the "help brought by the mind to the brute strength and personal courage of heroes."<sup>22</sup> Because of this, Athene is known as the goddess of Reason, the goddess of intelligent activity. Athene wanted Odysseus to "remain true to himself, to maintain his sense of balance, his reasonableness, his skepticism about heroic glory, his optimism."<sup>23</sup> Athene's wisdom focused on facilitating Odysseus' life journey. Her role included speaking to Zeus on behalf of Odysseus, guiding Odysseus in his projects, providing needed resources including the recruitment of persons to serve Odysseus, and foretelling what was to come. The affection Athene had for Odysseus was not possessive; it extended to his family. Athene provided counsel and support to Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus. Downing described this mentor as "soul-giver" and "soul-maker" because Athene guided the actors in the drama to find their true selves and to live with integrity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ennis Rees, trans., The Odyssey of Homer (New York: Modern Library, 1960), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Downing, The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 106.

<sup>22</sup> "Athene," Dictionary of Classical Mythology, ed. Pierre Grimal (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 67.

<sup>23</sup> Downing, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Downing, 105.

The interest in mentoring as a nurturing relationship has grown in recent years. If the number of dissertations written on mentoring is any indication, an explosion of interest in the process and functions of this nurturing relationship has occurred since 1980. A computer search revealed that prior to 1980, nine dissertations were recorded on the topic of mentoring. Between 1980 and early 1986, a total of 86 dissertations were written on the subject. Of the ninety-five dissertation abstracts surveyed, sixty discussed mentoring research related to professionals in business, medicine and education; ten dealt with mentoring college students; three considered ethnic differences; six used a business sample; nine were in the field of literature; one was theoretical; and six dealt with a specific individual as mentor.

The growing interest in mentoring is reflected in the numerous mentoring programs that are being instituted, especially in business. An International Center for Mentoring established in Vancouver publishes the International Journal of Mentoring. One management trainer has been quoted as saying that mentoring is becoming institutionalized in the business world with more and more companies developing mentor programs.<sup>25</sup>

The current usage of the term mentor in the literature reflects the traditional definition of mentoring which was conceived within a professional career context:

Mentoring has been prevalent for centuries in a myriad of life spheres and has often been associated with images of a senior individual facilitating a junior individual toward professional success.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Dan Hurley, "The Mentor Mystique," Psychology Today, May 1988: 42.

<sup>26</sup> Arlene B. Seal, "The Mentoring Process in Business and Academia: The Mentor's Perspective (Apprenticeship, Sponsor, Protege)" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1984), abstract.

Primary mentors were those perceived to be present at a critical point in a person's career, while secondary mentors were those whose influence was not as great.<sup>27</sup> Passing reference was made to a mentor's influence on personal development, but major emphasis was on the facilitation of career development. In fact, terms like "nonmentoring" or "mentor type" were used for more personal relationships. Stanton indicated the reason for this practice: "Because they were more personal than professional, it was concluded that they did not represent true mentoring."<sup>28</sup> Carol Gilligan discovered the same bias: "the sensitivity and care for the feelings of others that girls develop through their primarily dyadic play relationships have little market value and can even impede professional success."<sup>29</sup>

Daniel Levinson assessed the development of men's life structures in terms of their relationship with the world and concluded that forming a relationship with a mentor is common for young men. The mentor relationship accompanies the formation of a dream, a vision of what it means to live in the adult world.<sup>30</sup> The role of the mentor is

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<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Jane McNeer, "The Role of Mentoring in the Career Development of Women Administrators in Higher Education" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State Univ., 1981), abstract.

<sup>28</sup> Pamela English Stanton, "A Comparison of the Incidence and Process of Mentoring Among Male and Female Academicians in the Field of Physical Therapy" (Ed.D. diss., Northeastern Univ., 1985), abstract.

<sup>29</sup> Carol Gilligan, "Woman's Place in Man's Life Cycle," Feminism and Methodology, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1987), 62.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Levinson, Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Knopf, 1978), 91. Levinson defined the novice phase in which mentoring occurs as ages 17 to 33 years. The term young man is used here to call attention to data that have only been confirmed for men.

to support and facilitate the realization of the Dream. The true mentor, in the meaning intended here, serves as an analogue in adulthood of the "good enough" parent for the child. He [sic] fosters the young adult's development by believing in him, sharing the youthful Dream and giving it his blessing, helping to define the emerging self in its newly discovered world, and creating a space in which the young man can work on a reasonably satisfactory life structure that contains the Dream.<sup>31</sup>

The primary function of the mentor as a transitional figure in the life of a young man is to facilitate the realization of the Dream.

According to Levinson, the duration of the mentoring relationship is from two to ten years. It begins with a type of apprenticeship to a more experienced person. As the young man becomes more aware of his own authority, the capacity for autonomy increases. The mentoring relationship is part of the process of many years of effort to "overcome the sense of being a son or a boy in relation to 'real' adults."<sup>32</sup> In this transition, the relationship may become mutual with giving and receiving on both sides. What is more likely, however, is that the relationship will come to a tumultuous and conflictive end. Once the intense feelings have subsided, the young man may internalize many of the qualities of the mentor.

Sharon Parks agreed that a mentor is needed for the "expression, confirmation and fulfillment" of the young adult.<sup>33</sup> Contrasted with an adolescent whose identity becomes fused with that of a heroine or hero, the young adult is able to see the mentor as a separate person. Parks emphasized

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<sup>31</sup> Levinson, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Levinson, 100.

<sup>33</sup> Sharon Parks, The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 88.



that each interpersonal mentoring relationship is shaped by the larger community in which it occurs. The mentorship of an older adult contributes to the main task of life, the formulation of meaning.<sup>34</sup> Parks concluded that mentors in the religious community can enhance the process of making meaning:

to reveal a consciousness of being created for and beckoned into faithful participation in the delight, demands, and sacred mystery of the everyday . . . . The "real food" by which young adults will be nourished is an image of the future . . .<sup>35</sup> that is demonstrated in the lives of faithful and mentoring adults.

### Spiritual Director

Spiritual direction is understood as a process of developing a deeper relationship with God in a one-to-one relationship with a spiritual guide. Two basic elements define the process of spiritual direction: discerning the work of the Holy Spirit, or God's call, in one's life; and defining an intentional response to that call.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Merton described the role of spiritual director: "A spiritual director is one who helps another to recognize and to follow the inspiration of grace in his [sic] life, in order to arrive at the end to which God is leading him."<sup>37</sup> Spiritual direction requires a spontaneous human relationship. The heart of the relationship is the "clarity and

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<sup>34</sup> Parks, 177.

<sup>35</sup> Parks, 199, 204.

<sup>36</sup> Sandra Schneiders, "The Contemporary Ministry of Spiritual Direction," Spiritual Direction: Contemporary Readings, ed. Kevin G. Culligan (Locust Valley, NY: Living Flame, 1983), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Merton, Spiritual Direction and Meditation (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1960), 9.

simplicity of discernment on the part of the spiritual director."<sup>38</sup>

The process of spiritual direction began to be defined in the fourth and fifth centuries when pilgrims who were following special vocations for a solitary, religious life sought the advice and guidance of the desert fathers and mothers.<sup>39</sup> Ignatius was one of the first persons to articulate how spiritual life can be developed with the help of a qualified guide. He described a spiritual director as one who stands in the background, watching and encouraging the person on spiritual retreat while allowing God to work in the person's life.<sup>40</sup> Spiritual direction was to include daily meditation, daily examination of conscience, weekly confession and communion, spiritual reading and fellowship with other Christians, and daily growth in the virtues.<sup>41</sup>

Becoming a spiritual director is a lifelong process of personal and spiritual growth. Kenneth Leech identified the marks of a spiritual director: a person possessed by the Spirit who is known for her or his holiness of life and closeness to God; a person of spiritual experience who has struggled with the realities of life and prayer; a person of learning who is steeped in Scripture and the wisdom of the Christian tradition; a person of discernment who is perceptive, insightful, and has vision; and a person who gives way to the Holy Spirit by opening the channels of grace so that another may follow God's

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<sup>38</sup> Merton, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Merton, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 59.

<sup>41</sup> Leech, 60.

leading.<sup>42</sup> Urban Holmes described what persons expect of these "friends of the soul":

greater spiritual maturity, the obvious presence in them of the Spirit, a willingness to listen, a liberal amount of holiness, compassion, a total commitment to the other person's needs, an inability to be shocked, compatibility, honesty, confidentiality, and kindness.<sup>43</sup>

The context of spiritual direction is the created world. The basic conviction behind the development of the practice of spiritual direction is that a person's relationship with God is primary for finding meaning in one's life. The Christian community is a source of support and accountability. And one's relationship with God is interconnected with other relationships in the community and with the created world as a whole.<sup>44</sup>

The spiritual director becomes an image-creator by helping persons seek new images of themselves in relation to their world and their God. Imagining new possibilities for life becomes the main theological task.<sup>45</sup> For Jones a true spiritual authority:

- challenges us with our own potential, our own vision, our own presence of glory;
- leaves us busy thinking our own thoughts, rather than merely mouthing his [sic];
- leaves us with our own work to do.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Leech, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Urban T. Holmes III, Spirituality for Ministry (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 184.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Jones, Exploring Spiritual Direction (New York: Seabury, 1982), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, 89.

This description reflects the assumption that the spiritual journey belongs to the spiritual pilgrim, not to the spiritual director. In addition to the images of guide in the wilderness and friend of the soul, spiritual companion is used as an image for the spiritual direction relationship. A spiritual companion helps another establish a rhythm of life between the sacred and the profane.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most unique images in the literature came from Urban Holmes:

I wrote of the priest as a "wagon master" in the days of the American western frontier. His qualification was that he had been over the trail before, he knew where the water holes were and where the Indians might attack. The wagon master did not drive the wagons and all the travelers had to shoot for themselves. Each person's motives for being on that quest were their own and not his business. He had courage and commitment, but there were no guarantees of getting to California. I think it is still a good image and when I am a friend of the soul, I think of myself as the wagon master of the other's inner journey.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond images and names, the spiritual director is one who points beyond her or himself to the real spiritual director, the Holy Spirit.

### Sponsor

James W. Fowler believed that the terms mentor and mentoring are misused when referring to short-term relationships. Fowler understood a mentoring relationship to be a more involved, long-term relationship. He preferred the term sponsor:

the way a person or community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and models for a person's ongoing growth and development. The sponsor is one who walks with you; one who knows the path and can provide guidance. The sponsor is one who engenders trust and proves trustworthy in supporting you in difficult passages or turns. The sponsor may, as needed, confront

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<sup>47</sup> Tilden H. Edwards, Spiritual Friend: Reclaiming the Gift of Spiritual Direction (New York: Paulist, 1980), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Holmes, 186.

you, insisting that difficult issues be faced and that self-deceptions or sloth be avoided. The sponsor or sponsoring community should be able to provide both models and experiences in education and spiritual direction that deepen and expand one's initial commitments and provide the nurture for strong and continuing growth.<sup>49</sup>

Sponsor represents a short-term relationship where one more experienced person introduces another to "an area, a skill, or a status."<sup>50</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church has extensively developed a sponsor model for its parish confirmation catechumenate.

The candidate should be accompanied by a sponsor when he or she asks to be admitted as a catechumen. The sponsor should be someone who knows the candidate, helps the candidate, and witnesses to the candidate's morals, faith and intention.<sup>51</sup>

The sponsor role in this confirmation program is based on a long tradition of spiritual guidance within the Roman Catholic Church. The confirmation handbook delineated five aspects of the sponsor role:

- a. A model of how a person of faith lives in today's world.
- b. A friend who knows the candidate, and can witness to the maturing faith of the candidate before the community.
- c. A guide, confidant and listener.
- d. A learner who is interested in his/her own growth as he/she walks the faith journey with the candidate.
- e. One who will continue after Confirmation to walk the faith journey with the candidate and invite him/her into fuller participation in parish life and service.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 287.

<sup>50</sup> James W. Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 34.

<sup>51</sup> Roman Catholic Church, A Parish Confirmation Catechumenate for Youth Modeled on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (Los Angeles: Archdiocese Office of Religious Education, 1986), 14.

<sup>52</sup> Roman Catholic Church, 14.

The sponsor is selected and invited by the candidate to make a two-year commitment to attend meetings with the candidate and her or his parents. Because the sponsor has a major role in the candidate's preparation for confirmation, special training sessions are required for those serving in this capacity, and expectations are clearly stated.<sup>53</sup> Three basic qualifications are named:

3.1 The sponsor should be a mature person of faith and a confirmed Catholic in good standing.

3.2 The sponsor should reflect Catholic Christian values in word, worship and service.

3.3 The sponsor may be male or female, may<sup>54</sup> be the Baptismal sponsor, may not be a parent of the candidate.

In this model, the sponsor is a spiritual guide who joins another on a faith journey in preparation for confirmation. But the nurturing relationship continues after confirmation as well.

### Discussion

A variety of nurturing relationships have been defined in the literature review. By virtue of its socializing function, the coach relationship tends to be more deterministic. The coach intentionally creates conflict through accusations of backsliding while anticipating a particular outcome. The coach works to move persons through status passages in an expected time frame. In contrast, a guarantor is a person who is a reference point for another's identity. The outcome of this relationship is more open-ended. It is not based so much on societal expectations of development, as on facilitating the natural process of growth.

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<sup>53</sup> Roman Catholic Church, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Roman Catholic Church, 15.

The literature on mentor, sponsor, and spiritual director contains positive insights for a concept of faith-mentoring, particularly for the role of guide, the one who leads persons through the wilderness. A guide is a person who has traveled the road before and recognizes the landmarks. A guide aids another in seeing alternative paths and interprets the meaning of events along the way. All of the relationships call for persons, usually older and more experienced, to serve as guides for others. These persons model a way of life.

While each of the nurturing relationships in the literature is discussed in guide imagery, the primary usage of each type of relationship falls within different dimensions of life. For example, mentor is used primarily within education, business, and administration, while spiritual director is used solely within the religious community. Mentoring focuses on an individual's overall growth, while spiritual direction focuses on an individual's growing relationship with God, a recognized partner in the spiritual direction relationship. The basic functions are similar, but the content and frame of reference are different.

As a result of the literature review, the term mentor has been chosen to represent nurturing relationships through the remainder of this book. The derivation of the word increases the possibility that its usage can be broadened to be more inclusive. But the survey of the literature also reveals some serious issues for the use of the term.

### The Confusion About Language

The variety of terms and their definitions reveal some of the language confusion in regard to mentoring. The intent here is not to clarify the usage of all terms for nurturing relationships, but to focus on understanding the usage of the term mentor. The definitions of mentoring are primarily framed

within the professional sphere, thus minimizing the mentoring role of women and ethnic or racial groups who do not hold as many professional, executive, or administrative positions. Expanding the understanding of mentoring will increase its inclusiveness.

#### Gender Assumptions

In light of the fact that the term mentor originated in connection with a feminine goddess, a question is raised about why the contemporary use of the term in the United States most often stirs images of white, professional, executive men in business and education. A mentor is commonly understood to be a senior person who facilitates the entree of a junior into the system, a socializing agent. Levinson's work certainly perpetuates this idea, and his work is most consistently cited by other authors. The literature shows that this attitude is beginning to change, but mainly in areas where women have achieved professional, executive, or administrative roles and are, thereby, in a position to mentor in the traditional sense. This work will focus on the contributions brought to mentoring by a variety of persons in order to broaden the scope of mentoring possibilities.

#### Context of the Relationship

The contexts of mentoring relationships have most often been described within the more highly educated spheres of business, education and religion. This study will seek to understand influential relationships of persons beyond these limited realms, particularly women, persons of various ethnic groups, and previously-churched persons. Another contextual question to be addressed: Do different forms of mentoring relationships appear across the adult life span? The hope is that observing influential relationships as they happen in a variety of settings will add some additional meaning to the term mentor.



### Conclusion

Perhaps it is time to take a new look at Athene and to reclaim the positive heritage she brings in order to re-create the image of mentor. Descriptors used for Athene include self-confident, courageous, clear-eyed, strong, intelligent, accomplished, judicious, and fair.<sup>55</sup> She is represented as friend and counselor who helps persons with their projects, but who does not subordinate her own creativity.

Athene gives courage and confirmation, the sudden bright idea or the seasoned reflection . . . brings men [sic] into touch with their own highest potentiality.<sup>56</sup> . . . appears at the right moment as a true counselor and helper.

This study will focus on how a counselor and helper, a mentor, brings persons into touch with the possibility of developing their own God-given gifts. The challenge is to reclaim the term mentor as mediator of God's grace within the context of a faith community. As the literature describes, a mentor guides another person in the growth process. The guidance occurs in all areas (spiritual, mental, emotional, social) of a person's life because the mentor relates to the whole person. Guidance can take the form of reflecting, modeling, or asking important questions. The result is that persons are supported and enabled as they follow life's path. The definition of mentor that grows out of the description of nurturing relationships in the literature is a guide who journeys through life with another, pointing out landmarks, modeling alternatives, supporting choices, and interpreting life events. All of this is done in the service of facilitating another

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<sup>55</sup> Downing, 100.

<sup>56</sup> Downing, 106.

**person's discovery and definition of self.** If this guidance takes place in a spiritual context, the focus becomes one's growing relationship with God. The guide is an instrument of God, pointing to a power beyond her or himself.

The focus of this chapter has been to lay the groundwork for understanding how interpersonal relationships influence a person's growth in faith. The importance of influential relationships is evident. The literature review has raised the problem of defining and re-defining mentoring as a representative term for nurturing relationships. Other issues needing further consideration emerged from the survey of the literature. Most important, a definition of mentoring was constructed that will contribute to the development of the concept of faith-mentoring. One piece of the puzzle is on the table waiting for its connecting pieces.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Nature of Influential Relationships

#### Introduction

My friend is a woman of vision and courage. She is unassuming, extremely gifted, with profound insight and a deep sensitivity to people and nature . . . . She taught me to be independent, to take risks, to be responsible for my own decisions. She emphasized my gifts and brought them out.

Imagine what it would be like to live without seeing or talking to another person for a whole year. People do not usually thrive in total isolation. Love and nurture are needed from birth for survival and for growth. Teachers, relatives, friends, co-workers, and many others affect an individual's growth. When asked, persons can almost always recall at least one relationship that was significant in their lifetime. This book proposes that faith mediation occurs through these interpersonal relationships. The question which initiated the process of inquiry for this book will be addressed here: How are persons influenced in their relationships with other persons?

The research project attempts to shed light on the nature of influential relationships from an empirical perspective. The quote at the beginning of the chapter raises some aspects of the second part of the puzzle to be explored: How are significant relationships formed? What are the qualities and functions of persons who are significant in the life of another? What is the process of

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<sup>1</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 50.

the relationship? How do interpersonal relationships influence a person's growth in faith? The results of this research will contribute a second piece to a picture of faith-mentoring.

The influence of a significant person in the growth process can easily be missed. Interview respondents often expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to reflect on an influential relationship. Several stated: "I didn't realize how much this person had given me." On the other hand, opportunities for mediating the faith may be missed if there is little understanding about the nature of influential relationships.

### Thesis

The aim of the research project is to develop some understanding of how one person's life is influenced by another, particularly in the area of faith. The thesis is that growth in faith is influenced by interpersonal relationships. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze empirical data to see how persons are influenced by their interpersonal relationships in order to uncover implications for the development of faith-mentoring.

The range of relationships considered in this research encompasses the experience of churchled and previously-churchled persons. Propositions to be tested are that interpersonal relationships can be analyzed and interpreted by a phenomenological analysis of self-reported data; that any relationship can affect a person's growth in faith; and that common experience in influential relationships bridges divisions between churchled/previously-churchled, male/female, young/old, lay/professional, and persons of different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

### Methodology

Grounded Theory is a phenomenological methodology which was developed over a period of years as a qualitative and inductive approach to sociological research.<sup>2</sup> It provides for simultaneous data collection and analysis in an attempt to generate useful theory through comparative analysis.

we address ourselves to the equally important enterprise of how **the discovery of theory from data -- systematically obtained and analyzed in social research -- can be furthered.** We believe that the discovery of theory from data -- which we call **grounded theory** -- is a major task confronting sociology today . . . Most important, it works -- provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations, and applications.

The goal of this research is to develop theory about the influential nature of interpersonal relationships using grounded theory as a methodology.

Grounded theory is a process of observation and interpretation. Analysis of the responses begins as soon as the first interview is completed. The researcher attempts to put aside prior assumptions and expectations. The first step is to record observations or interview responses. Then notations are made indicating what is expressed in the interviews about the feelings, functions and dynamics of each relationship. Each time an interview response is read, more notes are made. Themes appearing in more than one interview are compiled. The responses are grouped into categories with similar characteristics. Related hypotheses, questions, and ideas are also noted. All of the recorded data and interpretations are used to describe and explain the nature of influential relationships.

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<sup>2</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm Strauss, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Glaser and Strauss, 1 (boldface added).

This analysis is based on the interviews of 41 women and 37 men who were asked about persons who had been influential in their lives. Although this is a relatively small sample, the results will generate ideas and data for future research. The data is retrospective, although most of the relationships were relatively recent. There are no data from the perspective of the influential person. The focus of the analysis is on one person's interpretation of the meaning of an interpersonal relationship. The sample includes both church and previously-church subjects.

The interview (Appendix A) began with the researcher introducing herself as a graduate student who was interested in how persons are influenced by their relationships.

I would like to talk with you about a person in your life who has been important to you and has influenced you in some special way. Your important person could be someone like a friend, neighbor, relative, co-worker, boss, counselor, advisor, teacher, helper, godparent, or minister. It could be a person you talk to when you have a major decision to make or a problem to solve. It could be a person from your past or from your present, a long-term or a short-term relationship, a positive or negative experience. You may use any reasons to make your choice.

The interviewer was careful not to identify herself as a theology student, and the confidential nature of the interview was emphasized.

Three general questions designed to elicit information about life priorities, religious attitudes, and value systems were asked first. The remaining eleven questions were directed toward the nature of the influential relationship. The issue of religious influence was not raised until the tenth question when respondents were asked, "Has this person influenced your relationship with God or your religious life? In what way?"

Those persons who had not participated regularly in worship or other organized activities of institutional religion for at least six months were

placed in the Previously-Churched category (13 women and 12 men). The Churched category included Participating Lay Persons (14 women and 13 men), as well as Religious Professional Persons (14 women and 12 men). All subjects volunteered to be interviewed at one of three sites in southern California: Los Angeles City College, an Annual Conference session of the United Methodist Church, and the School of Theology at Claremont. Interviews lasted from twenty minutes to one hour and were recorded by the interviewer in written form.

### Results

Even though grounded theory calls for the researcher to shed all previous assumptions and expectations, the interviewer was involved in this study as much as the subjects. The life experience of the person doing the research undoubtedly shapes the research project itself and filters what is heard. It is impossible to be totally dispassionate and objective when listening to persons share important events in their life stories, especially when the telling brings them to tears. As a result, the factors which influenced the results of this research need to be stated. The research was conceived and analyzed from the perspective of a white, middle-class, Protestant woman. The geographical context is southern California. An education bias exists since most of the research sample is or has been involved in vocational or academic education. Adult patterns of influential relationships are the focus of this study. Finally, the number of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American respondents is too small to judge the reliability of ethnic differences that appear in the data.

Because of the phenomenological nature of this research, inferential statistics were used. Projections of what may be important for a larger

population were based on what was significant in the observations of this sample. Frequency of response was recorded for the numerous categories that emerged in the analysis. The frequency in the data was then compared with what would be expected in the population as a whole. For example, the researcher assumed there would be no differences between men and women respondents regarding expectations of influential persons (null hypothesis). The chi-square (I) test was "used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies in one or more categories."<sup>4</sup> Tables 7-10 reflect that significant discrepancies were found. So the assumption that there would be no difference in expectations was rejected for specific categories. The degree of significance is discussed with the presentation of the data. Only the most clearly defined data are presented here. Data pointing toward other critical issues will be used for further research.

#### Characteristics of the Respondents

The age range of those interviewed was from 15 to 76, but the majority of the subjects were in the 20-49 age group. Ethnicity was largely Caucasian (71%). Other ethnic groups represented were Black (11.5%); Asian (9.0%); Hispanic (7.7%); and Native American (1.3%) comprising 48% of the previously-churched group, 29% of the participating lay group, and 12% of the religious professional group.

When respondents were asked what was most important in their lives, the total number of responses in the "Self-Improvement" category ranked

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<sup>4</sup> Vicki F. Sharp, Statistics for the Social Sciences (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1979), 181.



highest. Self-improvement in relationships was mentioned by 62 respondents (79.5%), in economic status by 52 respondents (66.7%), in self-expression by 25 respondents (32.1%), in spirituality by 23 respondents (29.5%), in education by 18 respondents (23.1%), and in health by 12 respondents (15.4%). The "Self-Satisfaction" category, reflecting the areas of creative and meaningful work, ranked second (39.7%). The third ranked category was "Social Involvement" (32.1%) which included working for social justice, social change, and peace.

Forty-three respondents (55.1%) had participated as children with their parents in institutional religion. Respondents with this background included 19 of the 25 previously-churched subjects (76.0%), 10 of the 27 participating lay persons (37.0%), and 14 of the 26 religious professionals (53.8%).

"Religious" was defined by 60.3% of the respondents as attending worship or participating in organized religion; by 19.2% as "God within"; by 16.7% as a world view; and by 11.5% as an attitude.

#### Characteristics of the Influential Persons

Influential Person is the term used in this chapter for the person identified in the interviews. Table 1 is a summary of the characteristics of the Influential Persons for each of the six groups interviewed: Previously-Churched Men, Previously-Churched Women, Participating Lay Men, Participating Lay Women, Religious Professional Men, and Religious Professional Women.

Table 1  
Characteristics of Influential Person by Selecting Group

37 MEN INTERVIEWED					INFLUENTIAL PERSON	41 WOMEN INTERVIEWED				
%	TOTAL	PC	PL	RP		%	TOTAL	PC	PL	RP
<u>62.2</u>	23	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>	Male	46.3	19	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>	4
37.8	14	<u>6</u>	4	4	Female	<u>53.7</u>	22	<u>7</u>	5	<u>10</u>
18.9	7	<u>6</u>	1	0	Cross-cultural	14.6	6	2	2	2
<u>59.5</u>	22	8	9	5	Older	<u>67.9</u>	17	7	10	10
16.2	6	3	2	1	Younger	9.8	4	1	1	2
8.1	3	1	0	2	Same Age	7.3	3	0	1	2
16.2	<u>6</u>	0	2	4	Deceased	17.1	<u>7</u>	5	2	0
45.9	17	<u>7</u>	4	<u>6</u>	Family	31.7	13	5	<u>8</u>	0
27.0	10	4	4	2	Helping Professional	34.1	14	3	4	<u>7</u>
27.0	10	1	5	4	Friend	34.1	14	5	2	<u>7</u>
5.4	<u>2</u>	0	1	1	Cried in Interview	14.6	<u>6</u>	5	0	1
<u>81.1</u>	30	7	12	11	Influenced Faith	<u>75.6</u>	31	6	<u>12</u>	13

% = % of total number of men or women interviewed.

PC = Previously Churched      PL = Participating Lay

RP = Religious Professional

Boxes mark data discussed in observations below.

Table 1 reveals data which are striking. Of the 37 men interviewed, 62.2% chose male Influential Persons and 37.8% chose female Influential Persons. The 41 women respondents chose 46.3% male Influential Persons and 53.7% female Influential Persons. Religious professional women chose 10 female and 4 male Influential Persons, while participating lay women chose more male than female Influential Persons (9 men and 5 women). Both religious professional men and participating lay men chose more male than female Influential Persons (RP, 8-4; PL, 9-4). The previously-churched groups chose nearly equal numbers of male and female Influential Persons.

Only thirteen of the influential relationships crossed ethnic lines (14.6% of the women; 18.9% of the men). Influential Persons discussed were usually

older, 67.9% of those chosen by women and 59.5% of those chosen by men. Thirteen persons who were deceased were discussed as Influential Persons.

Participating lay women chose eight family members to discuss, but no religious professional women talked about family members. Religious professional women chose equal numbers of helping professionals and friends. Previously-churched women discussed an equal number of family and friends (5 each). Both previously-churched men and religious professional men talked about more family members than helping professionals or friends. Participating lay men chose five friends, four family members and four helping professionals.

Eight persons cried during the interview as they reflected on the importance of the Influential Person in their lives. Sixty-one persons (75.6% of the women; 81.1% of the men) felt that they had been influenced, at least indirectly, in their relationship with God or in their religious life. Only one person from each of the four churched groups did not report religious influence by the Influential Person. The frequency of religious influence was lower for the previously-churched groups. Seven out of twelve men (58.3%) and six out of thirteen women (46.1%) were influenced in their religious life by their Influential Person.

#### The Relationship

The person who initiated the relationship could not be determined in three (3.8%) of the interviews. Also, family relationships accounted for 29.5% of the sample, so initiation was not considered. Of the remaining relationships, 29.5% were initiated by the respondent, 26.9% by the Influential Person, and 10.3% were mutually initiated.

Five women (12.2%) reported that the status of their relationship was the "same" as when it began. Relationships were reported as "mutual" by

21.6% of the men and 36.6% of the women; "growing" by 29.7% of the men and 17.1% of the women. Relationships that were becoming more "distant" were noted by 18.9% of the men and 7.3% of the women; "terminated" relationships by 13.5% of the men and 9.8% of the women; "deceased" persons were discussed by 16.2% of the men and 17.1% of the women. For the 78 respondents, 6.4% reported no change in the relationship with the Influential Person; 52.6% reported mutual or growing relationships; 24.3% reported distancing or terminated relationships; and 6.7% discussed deceased persons.

The majority (76.9%) of the relationships had a duration of more than five years. The most durable relationships included 81.0% of the relationships initiated by Influential Persons, 75.0% of those that were mutually initiated, and 56.5% of those initiated by the respondent. Of the respondents who discussed family members, 78.3% had known the relative all of their lives. In the total sample, a duration of less than five years was found in 23.1% of the relationships, a duration of six to fifteen years in 32.1%, and a duration over sixteen years in 44.8%.

Respondents were asked when they had last seen the Influential Person whom they had discussed. Nineteen of the 78 respondents (37.2%) reported seeing their Influential Person within the last month, 45 (57.7%) within the last year, and 63 (80.8%) within the last four years. Only 15 of the 78 respondents (19.2%) had not seen their Influential Person for more than four years.

#### Qualities of the Influential Person

The 180 positive adjectives used to describe Influential Persons were grouped according to similar characteristics. Each group was given the name of the adjective mentioned most often within that category. The eleven

categories were then ranked according to the total number of times the grouped adjectives were mentioned in the interviews (Table 2). The categories are listed by overall ranking with "caring" mentioned most often and "creative," the least often. Only the first six categories are described here.

Table 2  
Rank Order of Qualities of Influential Person  
by Gender and Religious Status

MALE RESPONDENTS			Ranked Category	FEMALE RESPONDENTS		
PC	PL	RP		PC	PL	RP
<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	Caring (93)	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	5	Accepting (79)	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>2</u>	4	<u>1</u>	Challenging (73)	4	4	<u>2</u>
4	5	<u>2</u>	Comfortable (51)	<u>3</u>	5	5
6	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	Fun (48)	5	6	4
5	5	9	Open (39)	6	<u>3</u>	5
5	8	5	Intelligent (35)	8	6	4
7	6	6	Consistent (29)	9	5	7
8	7	8	Authoritative (23)	7	6	8
9	7	5	Religious (20)	9	8	6
8	9	7	Creative (16)	10	7	6

PC = Previously-Churched  
RP = Religious Professional

PL = Participating Lay

Boxes mark the top three qualities credited to the Influential Persons by respondents in each category.

() indicate the total number of responses per category.

Caring included 18 adjectives which were used a total of 93 times, 64.5% by women and 35.4% by men. Other descriptors mentioned most often

in this category were loving, sensitive, generous, compassionate, gentle, and warm. As can be seen by the boxes in Table 2, caring was ranked first by participating lay men, previously-churched women, and religious professional women.

Accepting was second overall with 79 uses, 59.5% by women and 40.5% by men. Eleven adjectives in this category included encouraging, non-judgmental, understanding, affirming, and helpful. Accepting was ranked first by previously-churched men and participating lay women.

Challenging was the first choice of religious professional men. Previously-churched men and religious professional women ranked challenging second. The number of men and women mentioning this category was remarkably even. The churched group favored this category, with 69.8% of the response. Thirteen adjectives were used to describe the challenge of the relationship, including: strong, dynamic, exciting, energetic, and courageous.

Comfortable ranked fourth overall for women and fifth for men. In the individual group rankings, it was second for religious professional men and third for previously-churched women. Other adjectives in the 51 responses were secure, calm, relaxed, non-threatening, and peaceful.

Fun was the most common adjective in the 48 responses for this category; it had equal mention between men and women. Other adjectives included charismatic, friendly, outgoing, and other-directed. Participating lay men ranked this category third, while religious professional men ranked fun third along with caring.

Open and honest were the most common responses in the sixth category. Participating lay women ranked "open" third out of the eleven categories.

The Religious category ranked tenth overall, with a total of 20 responses using the descriptive words "spiritual" or "religious." Since 78.2% of the respondents felt they had been influenced in their religious life by the Influential Persons, this low ranking category raises a question about the availability of descriptive faith language for the respondents.

### Forms of Relationships

Three forms of relationships have been defined from the analysis of the data in this project: (1) Family - including extended family members, as well as ex-spouses and girl/boyfriends; (2) Helping Professional - ministers, teachers, and counselors; and (3) Friends. Table 3 graphically presents the forms of the relationships by age, gender, ethnicity, and religious status. Respondents were encouraged to select someone who had been influential in their lives using whatever criteria they chose. The boxes in Table 3 highlight the data from which the following observations are drawn:

1. Out of 23 respondents from Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American groups (13 men and 10 women), 17 or 73.9% chose family relationships to discuss. The rest chose helping professionals (17.4%) or friends (8.7%).
2. Out of 37 men, 17 (49.5%) chose family members to discuss; the rest were evenly divided between helping professionals and friends. The 41 women were almost equally divided among the three categories (14 Helping Professionals, 14 Friends, 13 Family Relationships).
3. Caucasians picked 22 friends (40.0%) and 20 helping professionals (36.4%) over 13 family relationships (23.6%).
4. The previously-churched and participating lay respondents picked family relationships (24 or 46.1%) more often than helping professionals (15 or 28.8%) and friends (13 or 25.0%).

Table 3  
Form of Influential Relationships  
Number of Family, Helping Professional and Friend Relationships Chosen as Most Influential  
by Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Religious Status

RESPONDENTS: RELATIONSHIP	AGE						GENDER		ETHNICITY					PREVIOUSLY CHURCHED		PART. LAY		RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONAL	
	MALE			FEMALE			Male	Female	C	B	NA	A	H	M	F	M	F	M	F
I. Family																			
a) Mother	2	3	0	1	3	0	5	4	6	1	0	1	1	1	3	2	1	2	0
b) Father	3	1	0	0	2	1	4	3	3	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	3	2	0
c) Grandmother	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
d) Grandfather	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
e) Spouse - girl/boyfriend	3	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	1	0
f) Ex-spouse - girl/boyfriend	1	3	0	0	0	0	4	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
g) Other	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
TOTALS (30)	9	8	0	4	8	1	17	13	13	7	1	4	5	7	5	4	8	6	0
II. Helping Professional																			
a) Minister	2	1	1	2	4	0	4	6	10	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	4
b) Teacher	2	3	1	2	1	0	6	2	6	1	0	1	1	3	1	2	1	1	1
c) Counselor	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	6	4	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	2
TOTALS (24)	4	4	2	6	8	0	10	14	20	1	0	2	1	4	3	4	4	2	7
III. Friends																			
TOTALS (24)	3	5	2	8	5	1	10	14	22	1	0	1	0	1	5	5	2	4	7
OVERALL TOTAL (78)	16	17	4	18	21	2	37	41	55	9	1	7	6	12	13	13	14	12	14

Boxes indicate data included in major observations made in the discussion.

Ethnicity: C = Caucasian; B = Black; NA = Native American; A = Asian; H = Hispanic.



5. Participating lay persons and religious professionals picked more ministers (9); the previously-churched respondents picked more teachers (4) in the category of helping professionals.

6. Of the helping professionals, teachers were chosen by six out of ten men; counselors were chosen by five out of fourteen women; and ministers were chosen by six women. No men talked about counselors.

7. No women religious professionals chose family relationships to discuss. They mentioned helping professionals and friends equally (7 each).

Although further research is needed, trends in the relational patterns for the previously-churched and churched persons studied here are evident.

#### The Content of the Relationship

Descriptive statements in response to the question "What does this person do for you? give to you? teach you?" were grouped into six content categories. The number of times these categories were mentioned by Gender, Ethnicity, Religious Status and Type of Relationship is reported in Table 4. These content categories were tabulated based on the total number of times they appeared in the interviews. For example, some persons may have referred to cognitive content more than once, while others did not mention it at all. The total number of times each content category was mentioned is indicated in parentheses.

Relational content includes all those comments that indicate growth in skills in relating to other persons: "He teaches me about ways to deal with or not to deal with people." "I came to trust people more, not to be such a loner, free to be silly, to talk to people, to encourage and help others."

Table 4  
Content of Influential Person's Influence  
Frequency of References to Each Content Category  
By Gender, Ethnicity, Religious Status, and Form of Relationship

CONTENT	RESPONDENTS										FORM OF RELATIONSHIP					
	GENDER		ETHNICITY					PREVIOUSLY CHURCHED		PARTICIPATING LAY		RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONAL		FAMILY	HELPING PROF.	FRIENDS
	MALE	FEMALE	C	B	A	H	N	A	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE			
RELATIONAL (68)	<u>32</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	1	<u>11</u>	<u>11</u>	9	<u>13</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>13</u>	23	<u>20</u>	<u>25</u>
IDENTITY DEFINITION (65)	28	<u>37</u>	<u>48</u>	5	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	1	7	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>12</u>	23	<u>20</u>	<u>22</u>
PERSONAL GROWTH (61)	<u>32</u>	29	40	<u>10</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>	1	<u>11</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	11	10	11	23	<u>18</u>	20
RELIGIOUS (59)	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>8</u>	1	4	1	<u>18</u>	7	<u>10</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>25</u>	13	<u>21</u>
COGNITIVE (35)	21	14	26	3	2	3	1	6	2	9	4	5	9	6	16	13
VOCATIONAL-EDUCATIONAL (33)	19	14	27	2	2	1	1	3	4	9	4	7	6	6	16	11

Boxes indicate top three content areas for each category.

Identity Definition is content related to discovering one's self, including personal strengths and roles. Examples of comments include: "She has given me permission in our relationships to learn who I am as a single woman and as a clergy woman." "He has taught me to know who I am and he reminds me when I forget." "I became more optimistic and more self-confident about my ability to succeed in graduate school."

Personal Growth content relates to the development of one's abilities and creativity. Comments include: "I learned to be independent and responsible." "He created interest in things to do that I never would have done on my own or with someone else." "He taught me to be creative in language, in writing. I learned to use new language, new thought."

Religious content reflects the Influential Person's religious influence on the respondent. Some said: "I followed the example of her relationship with God." "She influenced me to love God, but then I noticed that human beings are abused. I'm mad at God for the disorder in the world." "Through meditation which he taught me, I have had spiritual experiences which help me believe in a higher power."

Cognitive content is the information and ideas that were passed from the Influential Person to the respondent. "When we first met, I was feeling dejected and unwanted. I felt like society owed me a living since I had had my leg amputated. My friend talked to me about opportunities, but I didn't believe him until I discovered he was a double amputee."

Vocational-Educational content includes modeling career roles, discussing career alternatives, and planning the educational process needed for employment in a given career. Responses were: "My senior year in high school

I had to select an institution to attend. We talked about the merits of each, the athletic programs, what I could get at each school, and my chances of being successful. It was a joint decision." "His preaching set the pattern or pace for my outlook in life. I was mesmerized by his sermons since I was seven years old."

In Table 4, boxes indicate the most frequent responses in each category. Observations from this chart indicate some patterns in the content of influential relationships:

1. The overall rankings by gender indicate differences. Men identified relational content and personal growth first, followed by religious content. But the ranking for women was identity definition, relational content and religious content.

2. One can observe that Blacks and Hispanics ranked personal growth first. Blacks ranked relational content second and religious content third. Hispanics ranked identity definition second along with relational content. Asians ranked relational content and identity definition first, followed by personal growth.

3. For participating lay men, and previously-churched men and women, personal growth was important.

4. For the respondents who named family relationships, religious content ranked first; for those who named friends, relational content ranked highest.

5. Previously-churched men discussed religious content most often.

6. One surprise is that religious content ranked last for those whose Influential Persons were in helping professional relationships, the category which included ministers.

In terms of the total sample of 78 persons, relational content ranked first, mentioned by 68 persons (87.2%), while identity definition content was mentioned 65 times (83.3%). One cannot determine whether the religious content would have been discussed if the respondent had not been asked about it directly.

#### The Role of the Influential Person

Descriptive action words noted repeatedly during analysis of the interview data were used to name six characteristic roles of influential relationships: *Mirroring, Modeling, Guiding, Being, Caring-Accepting, and Expanding-Exposing*. Subcategories were necessary to explain the data in four of the roles. Table 5 illustrates the roles of Influential Persons according to the number of respondents who mentioned each role. Percentages of the total number of respondents are given for the six major categories and their subcategories.

Table 5  
Number and Percentages of Responses Regarding  
Roles of Influential Persons  
(Account of 78 Respondents)

ROLES	# RESPONDENTS MENTIONING	% TOTAL
Mirroring	37	47.4
Modeling		
Spirituality	52	66.7
Lifestyle	50	64.1
Values	44	56.4
Own Growth	34	43.6
Vocation	32	41.0
Intimacy	24	30.8
Femininity/Masculinity	20	25.6
Honesty	20	25.6
Guiding		
Focus-Direction	41	52.6
Methods	41	52.6
Personal Discipline	17	21.8
Aims, Hopes	10	12.8
Being Present		
Companionship	32	41.0
Attentiveness	28	35.9
Caring-Accepting	52	66.7
Expanding-Exposing		
Ideas	44	56.4
Experiences	38	48.7
Relationships	19	25.6
Information	14	17.9

Mirroring is seeing oneself through the reflection of the Influential Person, and it was mentioned by 47.4% of the subjects. Respondents often reported that the Influential Person reflected both positive and negative qualities. Respondents reported: "She made me realize how passive I tend to be." "He saw things in me I never saw before. He understood my language even when I didn't understand myself." Mirroring also included affirming

talents and abilities and projecting the development of those gifts into the future, e.g. "what I might become."

Modeling provides a living example of possible behaviors. The modeling subcategories are actually interconnected; they are only separated here for discussion purposes. Influential Persons who modeled spirituality (66.7%) reflected attitudes, practices, assumptions, and beliefs as part of the modeling process. One respondent said: "He modeled how to deal with Scripture, worship and theology in many dimensions with integrity and intensity."

A lifestyle model was one who exhibited certain standards of behavior, passed on traditions, shared attitudes about life, and raised the issue of life goals (64.1%). One respondent reported the most important contribution of his Influential Person: "He was a primary model of what it means to be a self-affirming gay man."

Influential Persons who modeled values (56.4%) provided a world-view, including guidelines for living and criteria for accountability. One respondent spoke about her business partner: "Although he was outspoken, sometimes shocking, he said what he thought and was always honest even in business."

Sharing one's own growth was another form of modeling; the Influential Persons shared some of their own stories (43.6%). The sharing of the experience provided a road map of how the Influential Person had met crises and growth opportunities. One woman talked about her mother as a role model: "She came to this country alone at age seventeen. She worked hard, even though she did not know the language. She was adventurous, courageous and loving."

Influential Persons modeled vocation through vocational roles, political involvement, and leadership roles (41.0%). This type of influence was

reported by one respondent: "He came to my high school when I was a freshman to teach English. He was a poet in a mining town. He talked to my family about the value of poetry and got my poems published."

Depth of relationship and recognition of one's own feelings were part of modeling intimacy (30.8%). One man shared: "This was the first time I had ever experienced love, and I didn't realize it until the relationship was over." And in another interview, a woman said of her therapist: "Being with her is like talking to a best friend."

Providing a model of what it means to be a woman or man was at the heart of modeling femininity/masculinity (25.6%). One religious professional woman described her Influential Person: "She models a woman who has it together, who is making it." Another said: "I am working on being more forgiving of men. I want to come to see that he is a model for the way men can be."

Finally, honesty was modeled by an Influential Person who was dependable and could be counted on to be as truthful as possible in any given instance (25.6%). Comments from one respondent: "She is a person of honesty and integrity. She never gave up on me and instilled in my conscience the desire to do what's right."

Guiding can be defined as the role of "pointing the way." There are four interconnected aspects of guiding. Over half of the Influential Persons provided focus or direction in life choices and self-understanding (52.6%). Comments descriptive of this role: "I would not have done advanced graduate work without this relationship." "He gave me a part-time job and positive encouragement to go back to school. When school was hard, he gave me moral support to help me keep my direction."



Guidance in methods was mentioned by 52.6% of the respondents. Methods included skills in problem-solving, how to analyze a situation, see alternate possibilities, and make decisions. The Influential Person was a resource person for the respondent. One person reported: "She gave me specific resources for spirituality, meditation, communication and listening skills."

Personal discipline included sharing one's own guidelines for behavior, self-control, and self-expression (21.8%). One young man reported: "He taught me to think before I explode. Emoting does not help handle a situation." And another said: "He taught me a standard for accomplishment."

A few Influential Persons expressed specific aims and hopes for the respondent's future growth (12.8%). Expressions of these dreams for the future were sometimes shared: "My mother wanted me to be Christian." Another respondent said: "I want to live out the gift of our relationship, to take his dream for me and make it mine." At other times, hopes for the future of the respondent were evident by the direction of the Influential Person's guidance.

Being present is a role which reflects the availability of the Influential Person. The role of companionship mentioned by 41.0% of the respondents included sharing, feeling at home, knowing the Influential Person would be available. One woman said: "When I was doubting God, he was there to talk to me and help me." Another described common interests with her Influential Person: "She was sensitive to the arts, finding meaning through other than words. She was unashamed to be excited about beauty."

Giving one's full attention to the respondent is central to the attentiveness role. Full attention was described by 35.9% of the respondents,

describing their Influential Persons as paying attention to what was said by listening carefully. Respondents said: "He has always been there for me;" "She is sensitive, a good listener, who is really in tune with me."

Caring-accepting included all of those elements which create an atmosphere of openness and trust. This role, along with modeling spirituality, was mentioned most often by 66.7% of the respondents. Comments of the respondents included: "The uniqueness of our relationship is that I am not afraid of rejection. I feel comfortable with her. We have accepted each other." "He has helped me begin to offer acceptance to others rather than always seeking acceptance for myself."

Expanding-exposing is the role of offering new ideas (56.4%), experiences (48.7%), relationships (25.6%) and information (17.9%). For example, some Influential Persons introduced the respondent to a new circle of friends. This role was evident in these descriptions: "My relationship with him liberalized my religious beliefs. He was exploring various paths of meaning and he got me into spiritual awareness and meditation;" "He always saw me as a minister and put me in leadership and worship roles where I could learn that for myself."

#### Gender Distinctions in Roles

While Table 5 reports the roles attributed to Influential Persons as a group, Table 6 summarizes the roles as they are attributed to male and female Influential Persons. The functions are listed in order of frequency to see what differences occur. Male Influential Persons were identified by 42 of the respondents, while 36 chose female Influential Persons. The percentages in Table 6 represent the number of responses in relationship to the total number choosing male (42) or female (36) Influential Persons.

Table 6  
Percentage of Responses Regarding the Role of Influential Persons by Gender  
(A comparison of roles attributed  
to male and female IPs by 78 respondents.)

42 MALE IPS	%	36 FEMALE IPS	%
Modeling - spirituality	66.7	Modeling - lifestyle	69.4
Expanding - ideas	66.7	Caring - accepting	69.4
Caring - accepting	64.3	Modeling - spirituality	66.7
Modeling - lifestyle	59.5	Modeling - values	61.1
Modeling - vocation	57.1	Guiding - direction	58.3
Mirroring	54.8	Modeling - own growth	55.6
Modeling - values	52.4	Expanding - experiences	55.6
Guiding - methods	52.4	Guiding - methods	52.8
Guiding - direction	47.6	Being - companionship	50.0
Being - attentiveness	42.8	Expanding - ideas	44.4
Expanding - experiences	42.8	Mirroring	38.9
Modeling - own growth	33.3	Modeling - intimacy	38.9
Being - companionship	33.3	Expanding - relationships	33.3
Modeling - honesty	26.2	Modeling - fem/masc	27.8
Modeling - fem/masc	23.8	Being - attentiveness	27.8
Modeling - intimacy	23.8	Modeling - honesty	25.0
Guiding - personal discipline	23.8	Modeling - vocation	22.2
Expanding - information	23.8	Guiding - personal discipline	19.4
Guiding - aims, hopes	19.0	Expanding - information	11.1
Expanding - relationships	19.0	Guiding - aims, hopes	5.6

Observations that can be made concerning the data in Table 6 include the following:

1. Modeling spirituality, modeling lifestyle, and caring-accepting are highly ranked roles for both male and female Influential Persons, but the ranking of role differs depending on the gender of the Influential Person.
2. Modeling spirituality was attributed to 66.7% of the male Influential Persons, but ranked second for female Influential Persons (66.7%) following modeling lifestyle (69.4%) and caring-accepting (69.4%).
3. A disparity in roles attributed to male and female Influential Persons is seen in the areas of modeling vocation (57.1% of male Influential Persons; 22.2% of female Influential Persons), expanding ideas (66.7% of male

Influential Persons; 44.4% of female Influential Persons), and modeling own growth (33.3% of male Influential Persons; 55.6% of female Influential persons).

4. One of the surprises of the data is that mirroring, reflecting back what one sees in the other, ranks higher for male Influential Persons (54.8%) than for female Influential Persons (38.9%).

5. Modeling values is consistently important across all categories (52.4% for male Influential Persons; 61.1% for female Influential Persons).

The gender differences observed in Table 6 led to a Chi Square analysis which revealed significant differences between the expectations of men and women respondents regarding roles of Influential Persons (Table 7).

Table 7  
Percentages of Men and Women Respondents  
Regarding Role Expectations of All Influential Persons

ROLES	INFLUENTIAL PERSONS		X <sup>2</sup>
	% 42 MALES	% 36 FEMALES	
Mirroring	54.8% (23)	38.9% (14)	1.964
Modeling			
Spirituality	66.7% (28)	66.7% (24)	0.000
Lifestyle	59.5% (25)	69.4% (25)	0.828
Values	52.4% (22)	61.1% (22)	0.600
Own Growth	33.3% (14)	55.6% (20)	3.898*
Vocation	57.1% (24)	22.2% ( 8)	9.772**
Intimacy	23.8% (10)	38.9% (14)	2.065
Femininity/Masculinity	23.8% (10)	27.8% (10)	0.160
Honesty	26.2% (11)	25.0% ( 9)	0.084
Guiding			
Focus-Direction	47.6% (20)	58.3% (21)	0.896
Methods	52.4% (22)	52.8% (19)	0.001
Personal Discipline	23.8% (10)	19.4% ( 7)	0.219
Aims, Hopes	19.0% ( 8)	5.6% ( 2)	3.166
Being Present			
Companionship	33.3% (14)	50.0% (18)	2.233
Attentiveness	42.8% (18)	27.8% (10)	1.913
Caring-Accepting	64.3% (27)	69.4% (25)	0.232
Expanding-Exposing			
Ideas	66.7% (28)	44.4% (16)	3.898*
Experiences	42.8% (18)	55.6% (20)	1.250
Relationships	19.0% ( 8)	33.3% (12)	2.076
Information	23.8% (10)	11.1% ( 4)	2.120

\* = .05 significance

\*\* = .01 significance

\*\*\* = .001 significance

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents discussing male Influential Persons expected them to model vocation, as compared to 22% of the respondents discussing female Influential Persons (.01 significance). A .01 significance means that the difference is highly generalizable; the chances that this difference will not occur in the larger population are only one in one hundred. Respondents also expected male Influential Persons to expand ideas (66.7%) more than female Influential Persons (44.4%), resulting in a

significance of .05. In contrast, respondents expected female Influential Persons to model their own growth (55.6%) more than male Influential Persons (33.3%), a significance of .05. This data clearly highlight expectations for the relational mentoring of women and the vocational mentoring of men.

As can be seen in Table 8, significant differences also occurred in expectations between men and women respondents who named female Influential Persons.

Table 8  
Percentages of Role Expectations for Female Influential Persons  
by Gender of Respondents

ROLES	RESPONDENTS		X <sup>2</sup>
	% 14 MEN	% 22 WOMEN	
Mirroring	28.6% ( 4)	36.4% ( 8)	0.236
Modeling			
Spirituality	78.6% (11)	59.1% (13)	1.467
Lifestyle	64.3% ( 9)	72.7% (16)	0.285
Values	64.3% ( 9)	59.1% (13)	0.417
Own Growth	57.1% ( 8)	54.5% (12)	0.067
Vocation	7.1% ( 1)	31.8% ( 7)	3.010
Intimacy	50.0% ( 7)	31.8% ( 7)	1.196
Femininity/Masculinity	0.0% ( 0)	45.5% (10)	8.814**
Honesty	14.3% ( 2)	31.8% ( 7)	1.402
Guiding			
Focus-Direction	64.3% ( 9)	54.5% (12)	0.331
Methods	35.7% ( 5)	63.6% (14)	2.679
Personal Discipline	28.6% ( 4)	13.6% ( 3)	1.224
Aims, Hopes	14.3% ( 2)	0.0% ( 0)	3.316
Being Present			
Companionship	64.3% ( 9)	72.7% (16)	0.285
Attentiveness	7.1% ( 1)	40.9% ( 9)	4.865*
Caring-Accepting	64.3% ( 9)	72.7% (16)	0.285
Expanding-Exposing			
Ideas	50.0% ( 7)	40.9% ( 9)	0.288
Experiences	50.0% ( 7)	59.1% (13)	0.282
Relationships	35.7% ( 5)	36.4% ( 8)	0.002
Information	14.3% ( 2)	9.1% ( 2)	0.230

\* = .05 significance

\*\* = .01 significance

\*\*\* = .001 significance

It is not surprising that women respondents had higher expectations of female Influential Persons in modeling femininity/masculinity (45.5% to 0.0%), a significance of .01. A significant difference also occurred in being-attentiveness, described as paying attention and listening carefully. Almost forty-one percent of the women discussed this role compared to seven percent of the men (.05 significance). In contrast, no significant differences occurred in expectations between men and women respondents who named male Influential Persons.

When comparing men's expectations of their male and female Influential Persons (Table 9), significant differences were noted.

Table 9  
Percentages of Role Expectations for Male and Female  
Influential Persons Discussed by Men Responding

ROLES	INFLUENTIAL PERSONS		X <sup>2</sup>
	% 23 MALES	% 14 FEMALES	
Mirroring	60.9% (14)	28.6% ( 4)	3.634
Modeling			
Spirituality	69.6% (16)	78.6% (11)	0.355
Lifestyle	65.2% (15)	64.3% ( 9)	0.003
Values	56.5% (13)	64.3% ( 9)	0.221
Own Growth	39.1% ( 9)	57.1% ( 8)	1.139
Vocation	69.6% (16)	7.1% ( 1)	13.640***
Intimacy	30.4% ( 7)	50.0% ( 7)	1.411
Femininity/Masculinity	26.1% ( 6)	0.0% ( 0)	4.356*
Honesty	26.1% ( 6)	14.3% ( 2)	0.719
Guiding			
Focus-Direction	47.8% (11)	64.3% ( 9)	0.943
Methods	60.9% (14)	35.7% ( 5)	2.208
Personal Discipline	34.8% ( 8)	28.6% ( 4)	0.153
Aims, Hopes	21.7% ( 5)	14.3% ( 2)	0.317
Being Present			
Companionship	65.2% (15)	64.3% ( 9)	0.003
Attentiveness	39.1% ( 9)	7.1% ( 1)	4.505*
Caring-Accepting	65.2% (12)	64.3% ( 9)	0.003
Expanding-Exposing			
Ideas	73.9% (17)	50.0% ( 7)	2.183
Experiences	39.1% ( 9)	50.0% ( 7)	0.423
Relationships	26.1% ( 6)	35.7% ( 5)	0.389
Information	30.4% ( 7)	14.3% ( 2)	1.242

\* = .05 significance

\*\* = .01 significance

\*\*\* = .001 significance

Table 9 illustrates the great difference in expectations regarding the modeling of vocation on the part of the men who participated in the research. They had much higher expectations of male Influential Persons in this category (69.6%) than for female Influential Persons (7.1%), a significance of .001. The chances for a different result in interviewing a larger population would be one in one thousand. Men also expected their male Influential Persons to be role models for femininity/masculinity (26.1%) as compared to female Influential



Persons (0.0%), a significance of .05. A significance of .05 occurred in the category of being-attentiveness (39.1% for male IPs and 7.1% for female IPs). Men expect their male Influential Persons to be masculine role models in vocation, as well as paying close attention to them.

Comparison of expectations of male Influential Persons with expectations of female Influential Persons by women respondents revealed one significant difference (Table 10).

Table 10  
Percentages of Role Expectations for Male and Female  
Influential Persons Discussed by Women Responding

ROLES	INFLUENTIAL PERSONS		X <sup>2</sup>
	% 19 MALES	% 22 FEMALES	
Mirroring	47.4% ( 9)	36.4% ( 8)	0.505
Modeling			
Spirituality	63.2% (12)	59.1% (13)	0.070
Lifestyle	52.6% (10)	72.7% (16)	1.776
Values	47.4% ( 9)	59.1% (13)	0.458
Own Growth	23.6% ( 5)	54.5% (12)	3.351
Vocation	42.1% ( 8)	31.8% ( 7)	0.465
Intimacy	15.8% ( 3)	31.8% ( 7)	1.415
Femininity/Masculinity	21.1% ( 4)	45.5% (10)	2.705
Honesty	26.3% ( 5)	31.8% ( 7)	0.148
Guiding			
Focus-Direction	47.4% ( 9)	54.5% (12)	0.209
Methods	42.1% ( 8)	63.6% (14)	1.910
Personal Discipline	10.5% ( 2)	13.6% ( 3)	0.093
Aims, Hopes	15.8% ( 3)	0.0% ( 0)	3.746
Being Present			
Companionship	63.2% (12)	72.7% (16)	0.435
Attentiveness	47.4% ( 9)	40.9% ( 9)	0.173
Caring-Accepting	63.2% (12)	72.7% (16)	1.010
Expanding-Exposing			
Ideas	57.9% (11)	40.9% ( 9)	1.176
Experiences	47.4% ( 9)	59.1% (13)	0.568
Relationships	5.3% ( 1)	36.4% ( 8)	5.754*
Information	15.8% ( 3)	9.1% ( 2)	0.423

\* = .05 significance

\*\* = .01 significance

\*\*\* = .001 significance

Women had higher expectations of their female Influential Persons in expanding relationships (36.4%) than of their male Influential Persons (5.3%), a statistical significance of .05. The significant data reported in Tables 7-10 reveal some gender differences which bear further exploration.

### Case Studies

The empirical research project has yielded data regarding characteristics and qualities of Influential Persons; forms, content and roles of the relationships, as well as gender differences. To interpret the data from this research in a different way, an example of each of the three forms of influential relationships (Family, Helping Professional, Friend) will be described. Information from three interviews will be used to answer the four questions raised at the beginning of this chapter: How are significant relationships formed? What are the qualities and functions of persons who are significant in the life of another? What is the process of the relationship? How do interpersonal relationships influence a person's growth in faith?

#### Family Relationship

A Native American religious professional man talked about the influence of his grandmother on his life. This significant relationship was formed when the ten-year-old boy began spending summers and holidays on the reservation with his grandparents. It seemed like home to him. He got more attention in an environment where there were marked contrasts to the city in which he was raised. The respondent revealed that his grandmother was "caring, loving, firm, like a second mother." When he spent the summers with her, she taught him the language and traditional values of his heritage. As one of the first teachers on the reservation, she had a great interest in education and encouraged him to go to school and to read.

The relationship was one of great stability, although the two grew closer over time. The grandmother "never raised her voice, but was always firm." When the respondent was in his teens, the grandmother became senile and was hospitalized. The young man tried to ride his bicycle thirty miles to the hospital to see her, but had to turn back. When he was finally able to visit her in the hospital, it was the last time he saw her.

Describing what she "did for him, gave him, taught him," the respondent said, "She taught me about caring for people, that I am never alone. I always have a responsibility for other members of my tribe. She taught me to respect the elders, to take responsibility, and to love books." This was a relaxed, ongoing relationship in which the respondent knew what was expected. "I knew that we had to go to church and camp meetings; I never questioned it. She believed very much in prayer-on-knees and passed it on. She loved flowers and herbs and my grandparents provided all their food themselves. Anyone who came by the house and was hungry, they fed."

This example illustrates the subtlety and power of the influence of the grandmother on her grandson. She deeply influenced his identity definition and world view.

#### Helping Professional Relationship

This significant relationship was formed between a Caucasian previously-churched woman and her male Iranian teacher. She discovered through his class that philosophy was important in her life. She described the teacher as having a "good sense of self and of what is important. He is not overpowering. He is empathic, warm, and understanding, with a feeling of caring and encouraging. He clarifies things for me because he zeroes in on what is going on and helps me do the same."

In the process of this relationship, which began as student and teacher, the respondent now describes her teacher as counselor and friend. He helped her learn to sort out her own priorities and responsibilities. Now the teacher is guiding her in the decision to move out and stand on her own. The respondent is growing in her relational skills by increased awareness of herself. She discovered an interest in philosophy which is giving her a grounding for her life. The only disagreement with her teacher is a current one. The teacher is challenging the respondent to get a job since her program is finished. She wants to stay in school longer.

The influence of the teacher is apparent in the way the respondent looks at life. The teacher has helped her see that everything she does influences her and whatever is done has a reason behind it. "I have more awareness of myself and my responsibility for others." The respondent also learned that life does not need to be so complicated. She sets priorities and lets other issues go. The re-establishment of a direction for her life is seen in the statement: "I learned I really liked philosophy and went back to a philosophical base for my own understanding of life." The teacher also affected the respondent's religious life: "He deepened and strengthened my relationship with God by helping me realize that a relationship to God is there for me. And it's OK that it is not formalized."

### Friend Relationship

A Caucasian religious professional woman began her significant relationship with her assigned spiritual director as they spent time together on retreat. She described her female Caucasian Influential Person as "a woman of vision and courage. She is unassuming, extremely gifted, with profound insight and a deep sensitivity to people and nature." Being with the Influential Person is like a "breath of fresh air."

The process of the relationship moved from dependence on an assigned relationship to greater independence and freedom to choose to be in relationship. The two continue to grow closer. The respondent reported that there is growth every time they get together. This Influential Person had a profound influence on her. She taught the respondent "to be independent, to take risks, to be responsible for my own decisions. She emphasized my gifts and brought them out." The respondent has been led to a broadened vision and greater involvement in world issues. Through this relationship, the respondent has come to a different sense of values - "people are more important than things." The respondent valued her Influential Person as a leader during a time of change in the church. And this relationship has deepened the respondent's relationship with God. "She has given depth to my prayer life."

Modeling lifestyle and world view by the Influential Person has been a critical role in this relationship. Challenging the respondent to grow in independence resulted in disagreements between the two. But by confronting old attitudes and lifestyles, the Influential Person facilitated a transformation in the respondent.

### Conclusion

The case studies and the other data from this research point to several important implications for the development of mentoring relationships which hold the possibility of mediating God's grace.

The preferences for different forms of interpersonal relationships (Family, Helping Professional, Friend) by the groups interviewed provide data for forming mentoring relationships (Table 3). The importance of the family relationship for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American respondents is

clear. For Caucasian women, helping professional or friend relationships were usually more effective. And Caucasian men were evenly divided in choosing family, helping professional and friend relationships. These differences need to be recognized in identifying forms of mentoring relationships.

Those who serve as mediators of the faith need exposure to other cultures and a global consciousness. Few cross-cultural relationships occurred and most of these were found in the helping professional category (Table 1). Persons of differing ethnic backgrounds need to be included in proposed mentoring relationships.

Since helping professionals can be identified easily (ministers, counselors, teachers), they can be provided opportunities to develop skills appropriate to faith mediation.

The importance of the family for Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American respondents, as well as lay persons, highlights the need for increased awareness of family issues so that family resources can be strengthened. Studying the data in Table 3 reveals the importance of traditional family relationships for non-Caucasian ethnic groups (17 of 23 or 73.9%). Previously-churched and participating lay persons also chose family relationships (46.1%) over helping professionals and friends.

Differing gender expectations for influential relationships affect mentoring. Table 3 revealed that males tended to choose more teachers (6 of 10) in the helping professional relationship, while females chose ministers (6 of 14) and counselors (5 of 14). How socialization processes and authority issues relate to these expectations is still to be explored.

Mentors must have an awareness of how life issues are interrelated in order to relate to persons wholistically in the contexts where they live.

Respondents were grateful that their relationships had helped them to define identity and vocational role, participate in meaningful relationships, and develop spiritual resources (Table 4).

The direction and outcome of influential relationships that mediate God's grace cannot be controlled by a faith community. Resourcing and input may be provided, but the uniqueness of the two individuals, plus the working of God, are the final determining factors. The data revealed that influential relationships tend to be ongoing, but the outcome cannot be predetermined. Even in assigned relationships like counseling and family relationships, the outcome was unpredictable. Very few persons reported termination of a relationship with a parent for reasons other than death. Most of the counseling relationships were an ongoing option if the individual chose to continue. Other relationships changed as persons matured, or geographical distance intervened.

The language of mentoring relationships still needs to be explored. Therapeutic language is much in evidence in the interviews. Faith language was used almost exclusively by the religious professionals. Can relationships that mediate God's grace facilitate the translation of common language into the language of faith?

All persons have the possibility of mediating God's grace for another. The case studies illustrated how three Influential Persons were mediators of the faith, mainly by example. All three helped the respondents discover their own strengths and gifts. All three provided specific means of building spiritual life: prayer-on-knees, feeding the hungry, responsibility for others, philosophical grounding, broadened vision, and deepened prayer life. The Influential Persons gave their time and shared the ways of life that were meaningful to them. The relationships were ongoing and dependable.

Using the data from this research, a mentor could be defined as a person, who by word, action, and presence, models a meaningful lifestyle, clarifies important life issues, and provides guidance for deepening spirituality in a caring and accepting environment. This definition and the background research become the second puzzle piece in creating a picture of faith-mentoring. Many questions remain to be addressed about forms of influence, identification of those who will serve as mediators of the faith, the effectiveness of assigned versus self-selected relationships, and the preparation of mentors. But the outlook is hopeful. The grace of God is being mediated through interpersonal relationships.



## CHAPTER 3

### Interpreting Influential Relationships

#### Introduction

You may give them your love but not your thoughts  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
Which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like  
you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are<sup>1</sup> the bows from which your children as living arrows are  
sent forth.

The work of Kahlil Gibran reflects the mystery and paradoxical nature of human relationships. In an attempt to understand mentoring relationships more fully, this chapter focuses on influential relationships as described in psychoanalytic literature. Three questions are addressed here: How does one person influence another? How is the interpersonal interaction shaped by cultural expectations? How can mentoring make a difference? The purpose of this chapter is to use insights from psychoanalytic literature to interpret some of the results of the empirical research reported in Chapter 2. This interpretation will become the third piece of the puzzle in the development of a concept of faith-mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet (New York: Knopf, 1965), 17-18.

As an interpretive tool, psychoanalytic theory can illuminate how one person is influenced by another. The work of four authors who studied psychosocial development has been selected. The writings of Karen Horney, Erik H. Erikson, Nancy Chodorow, and Alice Miller are reviewed revealing three major themes regarding relationships and their influence on a person's growth: the effect of early childhood relationships on adult behavior; the role of the environment in shaping human personality; and the kinds of relationships needed for growth and/or healing. These themes will be examined in order to provide a backdrop for the discussion of mentoring.

Importance of Early Childhood Relationships  
for Adult Behavior

Karen Horney believed that the ability to live one's life wholeheartedly is disrupted by basic anxiety, "the feeling a child has of being isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world."<sup>2</sup> Inner conflict begins at birth when a person starts interacting with the environment. The conflict can result in one of three neurotic tendencies in adult relationships. "Moving toward people" means coping with a sense of helplessness by trying to win the affection of others and leaning on them. These adults are viewed as compliant since they tend to subordinate themselves to others.<sup>3</sup> "Moving against people" is a result of seeing the world as a hostile environment. In this case strong and honest realists fight vulnerable feelings within and distrust the intentions of others

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Horney, Our Inner Conflicts (New York: Norton, 1945), 41.

<sup>3</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 50.

toward themselves.<sup>4</sup> "Moving away from people" leads one to be seen as detached and generally estranged from others. A need for self-sufficiency and relying on one's own resourcefulness contributes to this person's isolation.<sup>5</sup>

Erik Erikson also believed that one's life patterns are determined early in life when the issue of basic trust is addressed. The development of basic trust results in a positive attitude toward oneself and the world. The source of this attitude is the quality of the relationship with the mother (primal other).<sup>6</sup> If the result of the first year of life is basic mistrust, persons will withdraw into themselves in conflict situations.<sup>7</sup> Erikson maintained that growth proceeds through a series of stages, each with its own time of differentiation, and each related to the other. The resolution of the foundational stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust becomes critical for relationships throughout a person's life.

Nancy Chodorow concurred that the most important characteristic of an infant's growth is that it is relational. Early experiences with other persons continue to influence all other relationships during a person's life. A child's relationship with her or his mother is "the foundation upon which all his [sic] future relationships with love objects are based."<sup>8</sup> Chodorow believed that

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<sup>4</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 63-69.

<sup>5</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 73-95.

<sup>6</sup> Erik H. Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle," Psychological Issues 1, no. 1 (1959): 55.

<sup>7</sup> Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle," 56.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 79.

adults attempt unconsciously to recreate unresolved or repressed aspects of early relationships.<sup>9</sup>

Harmful parenting behavior, including harsh physical discipline and an aim to break the will of a child, from the eighteenth century to the present has been studied by Alice Miller. Miller believed the child has a primary need to "be regarded and respected as the person he [sic] really is at any given time, and as the center - the central actor - in his own activity."<sup>10</sup> Adults who are deprived of this early experience of respect repress their feelings of hurt and anger while continuing their attempt to resolve this need. The stages of "poisonous pedagogy" reflect what happens when a child's feelings and the right to express those feelings are denied.

1. To be hurt as a small child without anyone recognizing the situation as such
2. To fail to react to the resulting suffering with anger
3. To show gratitude for what are supposed to be good intentions
4. To forget everything
5. To discharge the stored-up anger onto others in adulthood or to direct it against oneself.<sup>11</sup>

Miller would argue that poisonous pedagogy is the most common form of contemporary parenting. The psychological trauma of an upbringing based on the assumption that the parent is always right becomes the foundation of most adult personality disturbances. When a child's feelings of anger, hurt, and betrayal are repressed and forgotten, they surface again when the child

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<sup>9</sup> Chodorow, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Alice Miller, The Drama of the Gifted Child (New York: Basic, 1981), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Alice Miller, For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 106.

becomes an adult. Adults often work out feelings about their own parents in relationships with their children.<sup>12</sup>

One basic conclusion from reviewing the four theorists is that the way persons are treated as small children is the way they treat themselves and others as adults. Of particular importance are the relationships during the first year of life. These relationships provide the foundation for one's personality and involvement in all future relationships.

#### Role of the Environment in Shaping Human Personality

Environment is critical in the formation of the personality. Horney believed that a person's constitution is not fixed at birth but develops in the interaction with one's environment.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, civilization becomes the initial source of anxiety since it produces conflicting expectations and standards.<sup>14</sup> The conflicts that develop can result in the neuroses of moving toward, moving against, and moving away from others.

Erikson's theory is also interactional in terms of the environment. His underlying assumption is that the human personality and society interact to shape a person's identity. "The stages of prolonged human childhood and the structure of human communities are part of one evolutionary development and must have a built-in potential for serving each other."<sup>15</sup> To establish an identity means to define oneself within the context of one's family, one's

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<sup>12</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Horney, Feminine Psychology (New York: Norton, 1967), 13.

<sup>14</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Erik H. Erikson, Life Cycle Completed (New York: Norton, 1982), 31.

community, and one's culture. In the larger sense, identity reflects an individual's link to the unique history of her or his people.<sup>16</sup> Identity formation is primarily an unconscious process of definition and redefinition through interactions with the environment. Erikson concluded:

The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one's self-sameness and continuity in time and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others [society] recognize one's sameness and continuity.<sup>17</sup>

Persons have an innate capacity to organize experiences in the environment according to Chodorow. Influential interpersonal relationships are shaped by the structure of the social environment.<sup>18</sup> External interactions with one's environment become internalized. Persons may identify with others who have qualities they want or fear. The result of this identification can be a modification of self to resemble the other.<sup>19</sup> "What is internalized from an ongoing relationship becomes unconscious and persists more or less independent of that original relationship."<sup>20</sup> Chodorow was convinced that gender differences in relating to mother have the greatest impact on later relationships. She stated that

the earliest mode of individuation, the primary construction of the ego and its inner object world, the earliest conflicts and the earliest unconscious definitions of the self, the earliest threats to individuation, and the earliest anxieties which call up defenses, all

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<sup>16</sup> Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle," 102.

<sup>17</sup> Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle," 23.

<sup>18</sup> Chodorow, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Chodorow, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Chodorow, 49.

differ for boys and girls because of differences in the character of the early mother-child relationship for each.<sup>21</sup>

For Miller, the consequence of a violent childhood environment is that the "poisonous pedagogy" from one generation continues to be transmitted to the next. Miller wanted to sensitize the public to the suffering of early childhood; to reveal how methods of child-rearing inherited from parents and grandparents affect society as a whole. The results of "poisonous pedagogy" are "psychoses, drug addiction, and criminality."<sup>22</sup> The violent environment of early childhood is perpetuated in society.

A common theme found in this review of psychoanalytic theory is that a person is shaped in interaction with the environment, particularly through interpersonal relationships. Life becomes a process of defining and redefining oneself in relation to the environment. Unresolved issues from the past become part of the environment of the present and shape the direction of the future.

#### Relationships Needed for Growth and/or Healing

Horney believed that inner conflicts could only be resolved by "changing the conditions within the personality that brought them into being."<sup>23</sup> Patients need to retrieve themselves, to discover real feelings, and to restructure their lives. The role of the therapist is to help the patient see the destructive side of neurotic drives and tendencies.<sup>24</sup> "The more we face

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<sup>21</sup> Chodorow, 167.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 233.

our own conflicts and seek out our own solutions, the more inner freedom and strength we will gain."<sup>25</sup> The goal is that persons will assume greater responsibility for themselves resulting in inner independence and peace.

For Erikson, the foundational stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust is critical for growth and also for religious development. Relationships with primal others, significant individuals who strengthen an infant, become the connecting point for identification with others, and finally for a relationship with an ultimate other.<sup>26</sup> Adult relationships can be constructive as persons continue to resolve the issue of trust. "Intimate friendships can help generate new productive identities and thus contribute to the new generation."<sup>27</sup>

Chodorow concluded that "the reproduction of mothering is a central and constituting element in the social organization and the contemporary reproduction of gender."<sup>28</sup> Since the experience of being mothered is the central formative experience of the environment, it is shaped by social and cultural expectations of the mother. As defined by society, the responsibility of the mother is to socialize a healthy child. A healthy child becomes a healthy adult.

According to Miller, the kind of relationship most needed is not one in which a person is treated like an object to be socialized, but one in which

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<sup>25</sup> Horney, Our Inner Conflicts, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Erik H. Erikson, Life Cycle Completed, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Erik H. Erikson and Joan Erikson, "On Generativity and Identity," Harvard Educational Review 51, no. 2 (May 1981): 254.

<sup>28</sup> Chodorow, 7.



persons can find themselves.<sup>29</sup> Children need emotional and physical support from an adult including: "respect for the child; respect for his [sic] rights; tolerance for his feelings, willingness to learn from his behavior."<sup>30</sup> Only through this kind of environment will identity and resultant relationships be different. Persons need an advocate, someone who will give them the respect they did not experience in childhood. The analyst should take the patient's part in the search to find her or himself.<sup>31</sup> Through this kind of advocacy patients will be freed to explore the hidden past and to express their true feelings.

According to the psychoanalytic theorists, the relationship needed for healing wounds of the past and freeing a person for the future occurs in an environment of acceptance and respect. A relationship which allows a person to uncover and to interpret experiences and feelings will produce a healthy adult. Positive relational experiences lead to a more positive redefinition of identity.

### Discussion

The themes developed from the psychoanalytic literature provide insights for understanding mentoring relationships. Interview responses from the research project reported in the previous chapter are used to clarify the issues.

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<sup>29</sup> Alice Miller, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984), 35.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, For Your Own Good, 100.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, Thou Shalt Not Be Aware, 54.

### Effect of Early Childhood Relationships

Early childhood experiences shape one's relational interactions as an adult. The assumption of the psychoanalytic theorists was that adults attempt to work out unresolved experiences and feelings in later relationships. If this is true, two issues call for consideration: selection of mentoring relationships and the advantages and hazards of mentoring relationships.

Selection of mentoring relationships. Much of a person's early relational experience becomes internalized. The memory of those experiences is unconscious. These unconscious expectations, longings, and needs create the framework for later relationships. Persons are drawn to others from whom they have something to learn. Sometimes, part of what is unconscious can sift into consciousness. One man described his relationship with a nationally known poet whom he had respected for years before they met in a writing workshop. As the man talked, this insight came to him:

I was surprised to discover at this stage in my life that people who are mentors are still intimidating to me in some way. I fear that they will hurt me in ways my parents did. Some part of my selfhood is not strong enough; healing has not yet occurred.<sup>32</sup>

This person wanted the relationship to be mutual, but he was still relating to the poet as an authority figure because he had not worked out his feelings about his parents.

A person's unconscious will also affect the choice of which relationships to pursue. One young woman described her junior high teacher as the first person to believe she had potential. When the young woman went to see her teacher ten years later to thank her for the early encouragement, she was surprised at the result.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, religious professional, age 42.

When I was younger, I looked for the godlike quality in people and always found it. My teacher was the first person to tell me I had potential. She cared about me, saw who I was, and challenged me. I always respected her, but could never be her equal. Now everything has changed; the rules have changed. I saw her in a different way. It was scary.<sup>33</sup>

The context of this relationship had changed. No longer was the student/teacher relationship appropriate. The teacher had been an authority figure who enhanced the girl's self-esteem at a particular time in her life history. Now the young woman was uncomfortable with the shifting roles and did not pursue the relationship.

Horney's description of the tendencies to "move toward," "move against," and "move away" from persons provides one interpretive lens for understanding how relationships are selected. An extreme example of "moving against" can be seen in this interview response from a Vietnamese immigrant:

My parents were very strict. I left them at 17 years of age and made up my own life. I am always by myself. I spent seven years in a concentration camp so have not had any normal relationships. I feel like I never really trusted anyone.<sup>34</sup>

The childhood relationships were still influencing this man's responses to others. He was so isolated from other persons that it was impossible for him even to finish the interview.

An example of "moving toward" comes from a woman who recognized that her counselor had all the qualities of the dad she never knew.

This was a providential meeting. I was not aware that I was searching for a dad. My counselor is blind and that makes our relationship special. He trusts me. I could manipulate him, but don't. We want the best for each other. There is a free flow to

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<sup>33</sup> Interview respondent, Asian female, participating lay person, age 24.

<sup>34</sup> Interview respondent, Asian male, unchurched, age 46.

our relationship. We draw strength from each other. We have become part of each other.<sup>35</sup>

In the beginning, the woman was seeking affection and dependency. Now this relationship has found a more mutual balance as she has learned to give more. As persons grow and change, identity is redefined and relationships can deepen. Sometimes what originally drew persons together is resolved or repressed once more, and the relationship is no longer compatible or necessary.

Advantages and hazards of mentoring relationships. If childhood relationships shape the unconscious, which in turn influences adult interactions, then both advantages and hazards are possible in mentoring relationships. One advantage of an older mentor with numerous life experiences is that the mentor has worked through unresolved childhood issues the younger person now faces. One man who reported that people are uncomfortable around him because he challenges the status quo said of his influential person:

Being with my mentor is both encouraging and frustrating. He calls forth in me certain levels that few people do. He has tried experimental lifestyles so his vision is still larger than mine.<sup>36</sup>

This influential person was described by this man as "broad-minded and experimental. He is committed to acting out of his conscience." What is not said is that the influential person had found security in his own identity and had become a model for this respondent in working out similar life experiences.

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<sup>35</sup> Interview respondent, Asian female, previously-churched, age 47.

<sup>36</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian Male, previously-churched, age 34.

A major hazard that exists is the possible entanglement of the mentor's unresolved, repressed issues from childhood with the unresolved, repressed issues of the person seeking guidance. One woman had gone home to nurse her mother until her death. She described her mother:

She was strict and severe. I was rebellious. It was hard to tell the difference between her and me. I was a more liberal Christian. It was an adverse, crazy relationship. She tried to make a martyr and a recluse out of me. She wanted me to be like her and I couldn't.<sup>37</sup>

This account illustrates why family members are often not considered to be mentors. Similar entanglements can occur in any interpersonal relationship and are one of the hazards of mentoring.

The research showed that either positive or negative modeling is important in relationships with family members and with others who serve as mentors. This modeling often transmits a world-view and relational skills.

Another woman spoke of her relationship with her mother:

I inherited a strong artistic and creative sense from my mother. My ongoing growth, even after her death, follows her patterns. I handle things in the same way.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to the previous example, this woman found that her relationship with her mother moved from the traditional roles of mother and daughter to an intimate friendship later in life.

### Mentoring and the Environment

The child becomes an adult in an environment of conflicting expectations and experiences. The psychoanalytic theorists emphasized that the human

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<sup>37</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 43.

<sup>38</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 43.

personality is shaped in interaction with this environment. One's identity is defined and redefined in relationship to all of life's experiences. Mentors can provide space in which persons experiment with defining themselves in relationship to the environment. In effect, the mentor creates a relational environment of acceptance and security. Mentoring participates in three areas of growth which will be discussed here: dealing with conflict that arises within the environment; forming identity in light of mixed expectations within a given context; and making meaning out of life experiences.

Dealing with conflict. Creating an environment of acceptance is an important role of mentoring. Allowing a person space to be her or himself helps the person see the alternatives for dealing with conflictive issues in the larger environment. A female religious professional described her relationship with a minister friend:

My friend allows me to have my own ideas, to be challenged by a different opinion without feeling put down. She still accepts me even when we disagree. Her greatest influence on me was in my ability to deal with conflict. I feel more confident about who I am. I know that stages of alienation and conflict are just part of a relationship as it progresses.<sup>39</sup>

The woman learned through this mentoring relationship that conflict is part of life. The choice was not one of avoiding conflict, but of using conflict for her own growth. She indicated that this friendship gave her the freedom to deal with important issues. The relationship led her to greater understanding of herself, resulting in a vocational choice for the ministry.

In contrast, the mentor can sometimes be a role model for what a

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<sup>39</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 43.

person does not want to be, how not to respond to conflict in the environment. A lay person described a lifelong relationship with his college roommate:

My friend was disciplined and caring. He was a free thinker within the limits of Christian belief. He thought one person could impact any situation. But he was often carried away with broader issues. He was a dreamer. At times I needed to do things with my feet on the ground. He was a role model with negative habits that pushed me in the opposite direction. He pushed me into action.<sup>40</sup>

Although one was a dreamer who pushed the other into action, both men shared interests in the church and in creative writing. The relationship endured in spite of different responses to conflict.

Forming identity. Erikson described a process of identity formation that occurs through a person's interaction with the environment, especially through interpersonal relationships. A mentor can create an environment of acceptance in which aspects of a person's identity can be explored. When a mentor mirrors what is seen, identity is recognized and affirmed. One woman said her influential relationship was "like stepping out of time," a place of safety where her identity was secure.

My minister is my vision keeper. He holds my image in trust like a jewel and gives it to me when I need it. But he holds it for me because it is his vision for me too. This image of vision keeper has become my model for ministry.<sup>41</sup>

The woman reported that this influential person always saw her as a minister and put her in worship and leadership roles where she could learn that for herself.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, participating lay person, age 66.

<sup>41</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 35.

A mentor can also be a person with whom one identifies, someone to be like. One woman described her influential person as a "touchstone" who knows her well and insists that she be accountable for her own identity.

Accountability helps her stay in focus.

I met her at Alanon when she was leading a session on detachment, on not getting tied up emotionally with others. I recognized her as a separate human being. She was her own woman, very honest with herself and with others. There was no separation between her inside and her outside. I saw her behavior and wanted to be like that, so I just walked up and asked her to be my sponsor.<sup>42</sup>

In this example, modeling became an important role in the mentoring relationship. The psychoanalysts would caution, however, that mentoring is more than modeling. There is an unconscious matching of unresolved issues that occurs in establishing a mentoring relationship. A mentor must have a good sense of self in order to discern an unhealthy relationship in the making.

Making meaning. Interaction with the experiences of one's environment continually calls a person's self-perception and world-view into question. Mentors can assist others as they organize life experiences in order to make meaning out of them. How is a person encouraged to make sense out of life? One man described his teacher who had shared his own knowledge and philosophy about life:

My teacher was calm and insightful. His class was very informal and students could express their own points of view. He challenged me to think about my philosophy of life. What am I here for? I had always been afraid of dying, but he freed me up to live. He changed my outlook on life. I felt like I was walking on solid ground.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 28.

<sup>43</sup> Interview respondent, Hispanic male, previously-churched, age 24.



The willingness of this teacher to discuss questions of life and death led the respondent to feel free to explore life more fully. One of the functions of the mentor is to ask the important questions that lead another person to meaningful insights about existence. Only in an environment where differing points of view can be tested is this possible.

### A Guarantor Relationship

Advocacy relationships in an environment of acceptance were called for by the psychoanalytic theorists. The advocate is one who affirms another, who believes in the worth and ability of the person, and who provides opportunities for that ability to develop. The similarity between this definition and Ross Snyder's guarantor is clear (Chapter 1). Therefore, the term guarantor will be used here for relationships that free persons to discover what is hidden from the past and to determine the direction of their future. Mentors have an opportunity to fulfill this role.

Sometimes a guarantor is needed when a person is exploring an area unfamiliar to family and friends. A 76 year-old man whose highest goal in life was to be a poet described the active support of his high school teacher:

My teacher was a poet in a mining town. I would write nature poetry and share it with him. My brothers thought I was crazy. My teacher visited my home and talked with my family to tell them who I was in his eyes.<sup>44</sup>

This guarantor relationship extended beyond the classroom to the teacher's ranch where the young man spent the summer. The teacher made arrangements for the man's poetry to be published and introduced him to the literary community.

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<sup>44</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, participating lay person, age 76.

At other times a guarantor gives a person the space to explore her or his identity in a safe environment. One religious professional described his friend as an "advocate for justice who was open to others in a personal way."

He came out as a gay man at a church meeting. He had to deal with authorities about that. We spent time talking about how he would relate to those authorities. He combined clarity, understanding, and warmth for the people who opposed him, but didn't give an inch. He was a good model for me. He taught me that we can't speak about God's love until we can love ourselves.<sup>45</sup>

Out of watching his influential person deal with life in his own unique way, this person was able to claim his own identity as a "self-affirming gay man." Through modeling and affirming, the guarantor creates an environment where identity can be explored.

A guarantor supports another's search for her or himself in an accepting, relational environment. One young woman found it particularly helpful to work with a female counselor because the counselor understood a woman's point of view.

My counselor is open and caring. I can talk to her about anything and look forward to seeing her. I can say anything I want without judgment. We work on the present and leave the past behind. She teaches me how to work with problems, how to think instead of going through the motions. I write out the pros and cons to help me decide rather than letting things go around in my head and being confused.<sup>46</sup>

The counselor helped the young woman see herself more clearly and be more self-confident in planning for her life.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, religious professional, age 39.

<sup>46</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, participating lay person, age 25.

### Conclusion

The psychoanalytic theorists provided insights into the important issues regarding nurturing relationships, especially the effect of early childhood relationships, the impact of the environment on development, and the kinds of relationships needed for growth and healing. A review of the specific psychoanalytic implications for mentoring suggests the following:

The establishment of a mentoring relationship is based on the internalized relational experience of both persons. What has been internalized in the past may be largely unconscious, and it provides internal direction to the mentoring relationship.

Because of this internalization, an unhealthy mentoring relationship is possible. An unhealthy relationship does not necessarily mean an instance of negative role modeling, -- "what I don't want to be." Even a negative role model can provide a reference point for the identity formation of another person. An unhealthy relationship is one in which both persons are trying to resolve their own repressed life issues through the other, and, in fact, some mentoring relationships are unhealthy. A healthy mentoring relationship requires an element of objectivity or detachment on the part of the mentor. This detachment requires the ability to be an observer, as well as a participant, in the relationship.

Mentoring includes not only modeling responses to life experiences, but also sharing a world-view, which is often internalized by the other person. Identification with a mentor can lead to assimilation of qualities that are admired, including a perspective on the meaning of life.

A mentor creates a secure and accepting environment in which persons can deal with conflict, with identity formation, and with the meaning of life.

Mentors are responsible for their own growth while serving as guarantors for the growth of another. Influencing another person's world-view, life commitments, and relational skills calls for a degree of self-awareness. Mentors need to be aware of themselves and their own life journeys, the ways in which their own identities have been formed. This awareness gives mentors the security they need to give other persons space to grow in their own ways.

The role of a mentor includes discerning what is happening in the life of another person, providing guidance in life experiences, becoming a guarantor for the growing self-awareness of another, and letting go when it is time for the relationship to change. A mentor participates in the formation of another person's life by creating an accepting environment in which persons can discover themselves and restructure their lives.

The psychoanalytic dimension of this study yields another definition of mentoring: **A mentor is a guarantor for another person's growth in a trusting relationship and accepting environment. A guarantor frees persons to see themselves in new ways, to cope with threatening feelings, and to test new behaviors.** A third piece of the puzzle has been set in place as this work moves toward the development of a concept of faith-mentoring.

## CHAPTER 4

### Mediating the Faith in John Wesley's Conversion

#### Introduction

In my return to England, January 1738, being in imminent danger of death, and very uneasy on that account, I was strongly convinced that the cause of that uneasiness was unbelief, and that the gaining a true, living faith was the "one thing needful" for me. But still I fixed not this faith on its right object: I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. Again, I knew not that I was wholly void of this faith; but only thought I had not enough of it.

John Wesley was in a spiritual crisis of major proportions. He had practiced his spiritual discipline better than most, but even Wesley's diligent obedience to God's law had not lead him to salvation. In a terrible storm at sea Wesley had witnessed the Moravians' faith in God's deliverance. To Wesley's dismay, he feared death before he attained the holy life. Wesley knew he had not experienced justification and he feared for his eternal life. Where would Wesley turn for aid in this crisis? Who would he find in his search? How was one person able to help when another could not? These are issues at the heart of mentoring which point to the central question: How can interpersonal relationships mediate the grace of God?

John Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage to Aldersgate is used as an historical case study of mentoring for three reasons: the many similarities between the

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<sup>1</sup> Nehemiah Curnock, ed., The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., vol. 1 (London: Epworth, 1938), 468. See Appendix B for the text.

contexts of eighteenth century England and the contemporary United States; the volume of written material which is available concerning Wesley's life; and the possibility of extending the boundaries of time and space in this study of mentoring. This historical case study will become the fourth and final piece needed for creating a picture of faith-mentoring.

John Wesley's faith journey can be better understood by examining his relationships from a perspective of faith mediation. The hypotheses that impel this fourth approach to research are that John Wesley's records of numerous relationships indicate how they influenced his growth in faith; that Wesley's writings provide an account of a spiritual pilgrimage of faith which can reveal forms of faith mediation; and that historical analysis can provide insight and direction for developing contemporary forms of faith mediation. New insights about John Wesley's relationships can emerge from examination of historical material using a phenomenological method. This method can then be used to analyze other significant relationships of Wesley and the early Methodists. Analysis of Wesley's experience of faith mediation can illuminate the role of interpersonal relationships in faith formation.

The passage above from John Wesley's May 1738 account of his spiritual pilgrimage illustrates that Wesley was an astute observer of human behavior, including his own. Wesley kept meticulous records of his life events. The reader of a Wesley journal is exposed to successes and failures, to frustration and anger, and to new insights of self-understanding. Wesley's accounts reveal his view that relationships were important, intentional, and influential. When biographers consider John Wesley's ideas in isolation from his relationships, their interpretation lacks fullness. When biographers focus almost entirely on Wesley's relationship with his mother, Susanna, the complexity of relational influences in Wesley's life is neglected.

The focus here is on the two persons named in Wesley's 1738 account of his spiritual pilgrimage: William Law and Peter Böhler.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to observe and analyze these two face-to-face relationships in order to come to a new understanding of the role of mentoring in mediating God's grace. The selection of Law and Böhler does not diminish John Wesley's other relationships. This is a beginning study of a man whose numerous relationships are well-documented in their importance.

### Methodology

Studies which attempt to bring John Wesley's relational experience and contemporary theories into critical juxtaposition are relatively rare. Robert Moore's study of Wesley and authority is one example. Using the theory of Erik H. Erikson, Moore concluded that Wesley's young adult life leading to Aldersgate revealed a struggle between initiative and guilt.<sup>3</sup> Moore indicated that the task for Wesley was to find his personal and vocational identity while reconciling himself with authority figures.<sup>4</sup>

Another example of work relating John Wesley's life with contemporary human science theory comes from James Fowler who analyzed the turning points in Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage in light of faith development theory.<sup>5</sup> Fowler concluded that Wesley's young adult pilgrimage to Aldersgate involved

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<sup>2</sup> Curnock, 1:465-478.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Moore, John Wesley and Authority: A Theological Perspective (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 115.

<sup>4</sup> Moore, 62.

<sup>5</sup> James W. Fowler, "John Wesley's Development in Faith," The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 172-192.

a transition from Synthetic-Conventional faith to Individuative-Reflective faith.<sup>6</sup> This development began with a prolonged struggle with parental expectations that Wesley assumed as his own.<sup>7</sup> The failures of Wesley's "dominating superego" in Georgia precipitated the experience of accepting God's love and loving himself.<sup>8</sup>

Moore and Fowler used pre-formulated theory to analyze Wesley's relationships. In contrast, this research attempts to let theory emerge from an analysis of Wesley's eyewitness accounts of his relationships. All three works are confronting similar methodological issues: How can scholars look at historical material using knowledge currently available without distorting the historical accounts? How can a person determine which information about John Wesley is fact and which is legend? Which of Wesley's relationships are most critical to the issues under study?

It is clear that John Wesley's relationships have not been analyzed using a method similar to his own. Wesley's method achieved its precision during the trip to Georgia in 1735. The style of Wesley's Journal is characterized by a description of an event followed by a comment upon it.<sup>9</sup> This methodology is one of observation and interpretation. The meaning was derived from the situation rather than from a pre-determined theory. Martin Schmidt indicated that a similar method should be used in a review of Wesley's spiritual journey leading to Aldersgate. The reviewer

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<sup>6</sup> Fowler, "John Wesley's Development," 181.

<sup>7</sup> Fowler, "John Wesley's Development," 185.

<sup>8</sup> Fowler, "John Wesley's Development," 186.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Schmidt, John Wesley: A Theological Biography, vol. 1, trans. Norman Goldhawk (Nashville: Abingdon, 1963), 14-15.



must grant to every single moment, at least to every recognizable phase in his inner development, its own right, and must deduce its meaning from the actual situation at the time.<sup>10</sup>

This study attempts to analyze two of Wesley's relationships in the actual situation at the time. Grounded theory analysis described in Chapter 2 has been selected as the method for analyzing John Wesley's relationships because it parallels Wesley's method of observation and interpretation. The use of grounded theory is more sophisticated and detailed, but it seems to be a natural extension of Wesley's method. In addition, the use of grounded theory allows for a greater possibility of comparison with interview data collected by the same method in the empirical research. Grounded theory methodology begins with the observation of the Wesley relationships as recorded in the primary sources. Observations are grouped into natural categories. The defined categories then lead to an interpretation of meaning and the development of the theory discussed at the end of this chapter. It is important for this research that grounded theory allows for the individual nature of faith pilgrimages and mentoring relationships.

The sources are all of the references to William Law and Peter Böhler in John Wesley's Works which include diaries, journals, letters, sermons, and publications.<sup>11</sup> The letters of William Law were included in the Works. Peter Böhler's thoughts and comments about John Wesley come from Böhler's diary as translated and described by Martin Schmidt.<sup>12</sup> The distinction between

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<sup>10</sup> Schmidt, 15.

<sup>11</sup> John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-1959).

<sup>12</sup> These references are limited, but serve to illuminate Böhler's perspective on the relationship.

Wesley's spiritual diary (pre-Georgia) and Wesley's Journal does affect this analysis. The consultations with William Law occurred in the pre-Georgia period. More thorough notes and observations appeared in Wesley's Journal when the Böhler relationship developed in 1738.

A basic assumption is that both parties in a relationship contribute their own heritage, experience, knowledge and personality to the interchange. The goal of the researcher is to see the relationships from the perspectives of John Wesley, Peter Böhler, and William Law. Each relationship has been analyzed independently following an identical process. All of the references to Peter Böhler have been read several times for general impression with notations describing incidents, actions, and feelings. General observations, questions, and hypotheses have been recorded. The same process has been followed with William Law. In this chapter the findings will be shared from these analyses, and the two relationships will be compared to determine similarities and differences. Finally, descriptions of the emergent forms of relationship will be discussed.

### Results

Any relationship is shaped by its social and cultural context. Eighteenth century England was characterized by many social, political, and ecclesiastical ills. The populace was alienated from a church in desperate need of reform. England was also plagued by poverty, illness, classism, slavery, prostitution, and alcoholism. Few people were educated. Poverty and a harsh life were the lot of the common people while the aristocracy lived in luxury. England was in need of conversion in the year of Wesley's Aldersgate experience. In this setting John Wesley's relationships with William Law and Peter Böhler developed.

### John Wesley and William Law

John Wesley was 29 years old when he met the 46-year-old Law in 1732. References to William Law in Wesley's writings began in 1734. The only direct reference to the nature of the relationship between 1732 and 1734 is found in Law's letter of May 19, 1738: "You have had a great many conversations with me . . . ." <sup>13</sup> Since Wesley did not visit Law after the trip to Georgia, it can be assumed that these conversations took place during 1732-35.

Twenty references to William Law are found in John Wesley's diaries. Eighteen of these notations, dated from October 1735 to November 1739, mention reading Law's works. The notations indicate that Wesley often used Law's treatises in his work with others. The remaining two references note Wesley's projects of translating and editing sections of Law's writings. <sup>14</sup>

After Wesley's return from Georgia, a series of four letters between Wesley and Law terminated the personal relationship between them. Wesley indicated that his letter of May 14, 1738, was written in obedience to the will of God. <sup>15</sup> Wesley had used Law's treatises as a model of piety for several years, but found the model unworkable for ordinary mortals. Wesley doubted that Law had ever experienced a living faith and assurance of salvation. On

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Law to Wesley, May 19, 1738, as cited in John Telford, ed., The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., vol. 1 (London: Epworth, 1931), 161-162.

<sup>14</sup> A list of Wesley's publications of Law's works can be found in J. Brazier Green, John Wesley and William Law (London: Epworth, 1945), 170-171.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Wesley to Law, May 4, 1738, as cited in Curnock, 8:319-320.

May 19, 1738, Law answered each of Wesley's criticisms carefully and suggested that guidance could be found in Law's books or the other books he had recommended.<sup>16</sup> Law refused to take responsibility for Wesley's spiritual crisis. In his letter of May 20, 1738, Wesley enumerated four charges against Law for failing his responsibility as a teacher to correct Wesley's mistakes.<sup>17</sup> Finally, on or about May 30, 1738, Law launched one last attack asking, "Who made me your teacher?"<sup>18</sup> He questioned why the Church which had trained him and the Bishop who had ordained him were not equally responsible for Wesley's lack of faith.

About the same time as Law's final letter, John Wesley wrote the account of his spiritual pilgrimage leading to Aldersgate. In this account, Wesley stated:

But meeting now with Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call, although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying Him [sic] as I had never done before . . . .<sup>19</sup>

Wesley had just accused Law of failing in his teaching and in his faith, yet included Law as one of the two people named in the spiritual pilgrimage account!

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Law to Wesley, May 19, 1738 as cited in Curnock, 8:320-323.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Wesley to Law, May 20, 1738 as cited in Curnock, 8:323-324.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Law to Wesley, May 30, 1738 as cited in Telford, 1:242-244.

<sup>19</sup> Curnock, 1:466.

No further correspondence passed directly between the two men. On January 6, 1756, Wesley published a 38-page refutation of Law's ideas in an "Open Letter to Mr. Law" which became the first formal articulation of Methodist beliefs.<sup>20</sup> The aggressive tenor of the relationship continued with Law's response in his Collection of Letters: "a juvenile composition of emptiness and pertness as is below the character of any man who had been serious in religion for half a month."<sup>21</sup> Wesley retaliated with an attack on the mystics in a letter to the editor of The London Chronicle on September 16, 1760.

Other references to Law in Wesley's Works reveal that Wesley followed Law's writing through the years. In 1760, John Wesley responded negatively to an attempt at reconciliation with Law initiated by Charles Wesley. The Journal notation of December 1, 1767, shows Wesley's continuing concern for Law's soul. Now six years after Law's death, Wesley concluded "that a Mystic, who denies Justification by Faith (Mr. Law, for instance) may be saved."<sup>22</sup> John Wesley continued to publish segments of Law's writings. As late as 1768, Wesley selected and edited two volumes of Law's works for publication.

In comparison with Wesley's references to his relationship with Böhler, one notes that some elements are missing in the Wesley accounts of William Law: no reference to Law initiating contact with Wesley; no references to

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<sup>20</sup> Wesley, 5:332-370.

<sup>21</sup> Curnock, 4:410.

<sup>22</sup> Curnock, 5:243-244.

eating, walking, traveling, or worshipping together; no notations of Law's travels; and no record of Law's personal involvement with Wesley's group, except for Charles. These omissions could be due to the nature of Wesley's early diaries, or to the nature of the relationship, or both.

What is known is that Wesley was reading Law for his own edification, as well as sharing the writings with others. William Law provided a model of piety for Wesley. Perhaps Law did understand Wesley's spiritual crisis better than Wesley thought at the time. On January 9, 1789, Wesley quoted Law's advice in a letter of counsel to a Miss Bolton:

"Sir, you are troubled," said Mr. Law to me, "because you do not understand how God is dealing with you. Perhaps if you did, it would not so well answer His [sic] design. He is teaching you to trust Him farther than you can see Him."<sup>23</sup>

Form of the relationship. The form of faith mediation in the Wesley-Law relationship is between student and teacher. The relational process began with Wesley, the avid student, becoming enamored with the ideas of Law. Wesley initiated contact with Law and several conversations followed. But Wesley found problems with the practice of Law's teachings. Confrontation and blame followed in the 1738 letters. Wesley concluded that Law's inadequacies as a teacher had lead to the failures of his student. The letters ended the personal contact between the two men, but Wesley persisted in criticizing his teacher's work in published materials.

Throughout the relationship, Law appeared to maintain some distance. He was available when called upon for advice or consultation, functioning as advisor and guide. As the teacher, Law made decisions about what should be

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<sup>23</sup> Wesley, 12:486.

taught based on observations and discernment about the needs and abilities of the student. Finally, Law insisted that Wesley take responsibility for his own learning.

Peter Böhler, a younger friend who came to dominate Wesley's time and thoughts, also influenced the direction of the Law relationship. Böhler and Law met quite by accident one day and had a brief discussion. In the 1738 letters, Law accused Böhler of giving Wesley a false account of their discussion, thereby precipitating Wesley's accusatory letters. The closeness of Böhler and Wesley framed a sharp contrast to the impersonal distance of Law. It was inevitable that Wesley would compare Böhler and Law as models of piety, and Law was found lacking.

Once John Wesley's identity was more firmly established, respect and admiration for Law reappeared in Wesley's sermons and writings. Wesley was able to reconcile the differences in his own mind so he could say of The Serious Call in a sermon in September, 1788:

a treatise which will hardly be excelled, if it be equalled, in the English tongue, either for beauty of expression, or for the justness and depth of thought.<sup>24</sup>

#### John Wesley and Peter Böhler

In February of 1738, John Wesley met Peter Böhler who was on the way to Carolina as a representative of the Moravians. Böhler was 26 years of age, nine years younger than Wesley. The two immediately became friends. Ten references in Wesley's 1738 diary depict Wesley as spending time with Böhler, usually "at home," or "conversing," walking, and travelling together. One of

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<sup>24</sup> Green, 44.

the two remaining notations in 1741 was to a reunion love feast following Böhler's return from America. The final reference recorded a meeting with Spangenberg, Böhler and Morris to discuss a possible merger of the Moravians and the Methodists.

The Journal contains twenty-two references to Peter Böhler beginning on February 7, 1738. Of the first sixteen notations, nine are related to Wesley's struggle to understand and to accept Böhler's ideas about living faith and instantaneous conversion. The frequent references to Böhler in the Journal end in 1741. One further reference in 1752 regarded a letter from Böhler to Whitefield, and the final reference in 1783 recalled Wesley's first meeting with Peter Böhler.

Other references to Böhler in John Wesley's Works begin in 1740 with "The Principles of a Methodist." Wesley gave credit to Böhler for his influence while separating himself from it. "Yet it was not Peter Böhler who convinced me that conversion (I mean justification) was an instantaneous work."<sup>25</sup> In February, 1775, Wesley and Böhler exchanged three letters concerning the differences between the Moravians and the Methodists two months before Böhler's death and thirty-four years after the last mention of a personal meeting. Finally, Wesley credited Peter Böhler for his assistance in beginning the Methodist society in "The People Called Methodists" on November 16, 1781:

On Monday, May 1, our little society began in London . . . . In all our steps we were greatly assisted by the advice and exhortations of Peter Böhler, an excellent young man, belonging to

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<sup>25</sup> Wesley, 8:366.



the society commonly called Moravians.<sup>26</sup>

Wesley's relationship with Peter Böhler developed quickly and was very intense from February to May of 1738 when Böhler left for Carolina. Wesley records a "long conversation" with Böhler on April 6, 1741. Five more conversations occurred in April and May. The conversation on June 11, 1741, appears to be the final face-to-face visit between the two men.

In comparison with Wesley's references to his relationship with Law, one notes that some elements are missing in the Wesley accounts of Peter Böhler: no substantive quotations of Böhler in Wesley sermons; no editing and publication of Böhler's works; no ongoing struggle with Böhler's thought after 1741; and no public debate. This relationship was an affectionate one. By 1741, when it became clear that Wesley would not join the Moravians, John Wesley and Peter Böhler went their own ways, parting as friends.

Form of the relationship. Faith mediation in this relationship follows a friendship form. The relationship of John Wesley and Peter Böhler was a mutual relationship, but the Wesley's accounts clearly reflect Böhler's predominant role in faith mediation for Wesley. The two shared much in common: their deep concerns about faith and vocation; the fellowship of walking, talking, eating, and worshipping together; their deep affection for one another; their acquaintances; the qualities of intensity, conviction and caring; shared experience of mission in America, as well as their religious quest; and commitment to their presence with one another. Since Böhler had experienced a saving faith, he guided Wesley's preparation for conversion.

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<sup>26</sup> Wesley, 13:307.

In this way Böhler brought Wesley to that state in which he wished him to be, and at the same time Wesley was prepared for it by many circumstances. At the psychological moment Böhler provided personal witness of the living faith which lays hold of justification. He helped Wesley in an important way to rid himself of placing too great an emphasis upon a Christian ethic, and so from a certain restrictive factor which had been present in his striving after holiness.<sup>27</sup>

After a series of discussions in 1741, it became clear that the two friends were going their separate ways theologically. Even though Böhler wanted Wesley to join the Moravians, their work would not be merged.

### Discussion

John Wesley's spiritual crisis precipitated his awareness of the inadequacies of his own faith; it led him to Peter Böhler. William Law's external authority and personal discipline were no longer enough. Peter Böhler was a living witness to the kind of inner faith that Wesley sought. As the Böhler relationship developed, the Law relationship deteriorated into open hostility. Wesley's relationships with Law and Böhler do provide an interesting contrast. Wesley scholars tend to emphasize the break in Wesley's relationship with Law, while Böhler is seen as the major influence in Wesley's conversion. From reading biographers' accounts, one would tend to assume that William Law's influence ended in 1738 and that Böhler's influence continued indefinitely. As this research shows, such a conclusion is incorrect.

Observing these relationships as they happened through study of primary sources has shed some light on how Peter Böhler supplanted William Law as John Wesley's primary faith mediator. The insights gained in this research will be addressed here in the form of five questions. Background information

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<sup>27</sup> Schmidt, 241.

from a review of Wesley biographers will be included to add depth to the discussion.

#### Who Is a Mentor and What Are Her or His Roles?

The relationship between John Wesley and William Law is an example of how faith can be mediated through a conflicting relationship. A weaker person would have fled under the assault that Wesley launched against Law. And yet Law could still counsel in the midst of the fray:

The head can as easily amuse itself with a living and justifying faith in the blood of Jesus, as with any other notion; and the heart, which you suppose to be a place of security,<sup>28</sup> as being the seat of self-love, is more deceitful than the head.

Law's role as mentor included giving Wesley freedom to face his own struggles and refusing to take responsibility for Wesley's crisis. Perhaps the distance and wisdom of age and experience helped Law maintain his sense of detachment. Even under attack, Law continued to witness to his point of view. This mentor was both a thorn in the side and a most powerful mediator of God's grace. He could not be ignored, especially when Wesley recognized the merit of what Law taught.

The depth of Law's influence on John Wesley is most apparent in the ongoing references to Law throughout Wesley's life and work. The two men did not speak in person after 1734, yet Wesley was constantly struggling with Law's point of view, often condemning it, but always coming back to it. He published Law's works and quoted Law in letters, in sermons, and in publications. Even though Law's later mystical tendencies were unacceptable to Wesley, the model for piety that Law advocated was formative in Wesley's thought.

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<sup>28</sup> Curnock, 8:322.

The Wesley-Böhler relationship was essentially a brief, intense encounter which altered the life of John Wesley. As Wesley claimed later, he already understood justification, but he was led to experience it by Böhler's intentional direction.<sup>29</sup> Even though the duration of personal contact was brief, the time spent with Böhler provided the constancy of encounter needed to effect change.

The analysis of Wesley's relationships with William Law and Peter Böhler is helpful in understanding mentoring as mediation of the faith. Peter Böhler was fairly directive in his relationship with Wesley, but William Law appears to have been more non-directive. While their interchange of ideas was important, Law apparently did not make any attempt to convert Wesley.<sup>30</sup> Law and Böhler, each in his own way, contributed to the intellectual, emotional, personal, vocational, and spiritual growth of Wesley.

#### How Do Individual Needs and Characteristics

##### Influence a Mentoring Relationship?

A person's readiness for relationship is important in establishing a mentoring relationship. Rev. L. Tyerman noted that John Wesley read William Law's Christian Perfection and A Serious Call to A Devout and Holy Life shortly after their publication.<sup>31</sup> By this time Wesley's interest in perfection and a lifestyle of spiritual discipline was well-developed. Law's treatises were related to Wesley's interests. In July of 1732, John Wesley visited Law

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<sup>29</sup> Wesley, 8:366.

<sup>30</sup> Schmidt, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Rev. L. Tyerman, The Life and Times of Rev. John Wesley (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1890), 51.

and "commenced a friendship which lasted for several years."<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, Martin Schmidt described Wesley's readiness for a relationship with Peter Böhler:

Nevertheless, Böhler would not have been able to influence him so strongly had not the actual circumstances of his life first prepared the way . . . . Everything about him had been shaken, and much was destroyed . . . . This was the reason why he was prepared to entrust himself so completely to Böhler, who was able to formulate what he really felt . . . .<sup>33</sup>

What has been internalized from the past shapes current relationships. Wesley's initiation of these particular relationships with Law and Böhler was probably influenced by observation of his own needs. He could see the characteristics in others that would meet those needs. Often impulsive and emotional under duress, Wesley was persistent in pursuing a solution to issues which troubled him. Wesley needed an environment in which he could deal with the inner conflict of his identity formation (Chapter 3).

At different points in his development John Wesley was ready for these two encounters. He sought out both Law and Böhler creating time and space for the relationships. Individual needs can change and affect the direction of a relationship. When John Wesley returned from Georgia in January, 1738, he was aware that spiritual discipline built on Law's teachings did not produce a saving faith. Law had also changed. He had become absorbed with the mystical writings of Jacob Boehme.<sup>34</sup> Now Wesley was in a crisis that Law appeared not to understand.

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<sup>32</sup> Tyerman, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt, 254-255.

<sup>34</sup> Green, 60.

## How Do Expectations of the Relationship

### Affect Its Direction?

The course of a relationship is often determined by the eye of the beholder. When Wesley returned from Georgia, he did not go to visit Law to discuss his spiritual state. In a letter dated May 14, 1738, John Wesley blamed Law's own lack of faith as the cause of Wesley's spiritual crisis.

Green observed that Wesley's letter:

reads like the outburst of a disappointed man who is now trying to lay the blame upon his mentor, until its burning sincerity persuades the reader that behind this revelation of spiritual agony there is a deep and simple anxiety, not only for the deliverance of his own distressed soul, but for that of his imperfect instructor.<sup>35</sup>

Peter Böhler brought to John Wesley what William Law could not. Böhler understood Wesley's spiritual crisis. The needs of the moment were met through Böhler's enthusiasm in sharing his faith. By constantly challenging Wesley's ideas and personal expression of faith, Böhler led Wesley out of his spiritual crisis.

John Wesley expected both William Law and Peter Böhler to be available for guidance. How much of Wesley's expectations were shaped by his relationship with Susanna is yet to be researched. In 1734, Wesley wrote to Law asking for advice regarding Wesley's work with an undisciplined student. The letter was probably followed by a visit for consultation. Likewise, Wesley recorded an average of four conversations a month with Peter Böhler.

John Wesley also anticipated challenging new ideas to come from these relationships. He expected Law to comment if Wesley had made some error in

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<sup>35</sup> Green, 66.

directing the wayward student. And Wesley was determined to understand Böhler's ideas: "All this time I conversed much with Peter Böhler; but I understood him not, and least of all when he said, . . . 'My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away.'"<sup>36</sup> The challenge of learning new ideas and practices were part of Wesley's expectations.

Another expectation was that William Law, as Wesley's teacher, should have corrected all of Wesley's errors in understanding the faith. From the perspective of the devastating results of the trip to Georgia, Wesley felt that Law should have taught him everything he needed to know. Whether Wesley would have expected so much in a less stressful time is uncertain. But Wesley's charges did lead Law to demand an end to the discussion.

From a later perspective, Wesley made revealing observations about both relationships. On April 6, 1741, Wesley said:

I had a long conversation with Peter Böhler. I marvel how I refrain from joining these men [the Moravians]. I scarce ever see any of them but my heart burns within me. I long to be with them; and yet I am kept from them.<sup>37</sup>

Wesley had come to value the inspiration and fellowship of Böhler and the Moravians. And of William Law's influence, Wesley said in "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" in 1777:

A year or two after, Mr. Law's "Christian Perfection" and "Serious Call" were put into my hands. These convinced me, more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his [sic] grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of,) to be all-devoted to God, to

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<sup>36</sup> February 18, 1738. Curnock, 1:440.

<sup>37</sup> Curnock, 2:441-442.

give him all my soul, my body, and my substance.<sup>38</sup>

Disillusionment with Law came only when Law could take Wesley no farther. Wesley's expectations led him to alienation from Law and to appreciation of Böhler.

What Is the Effect of Oral and Written Communication  
on a Mentoring Relationship?

Oral communication was important in these relationships. Between February 7 and May 4, 1738, Wesley used every opportunity available to converse with Böhler.<sup>39</sup> While Wesley had made the short trip to Putney several times in earlier years, now he had no personal contact with Law.<sup>40</sup> The change in amount of oral communication was certainly an indication of a change in Wesley's attitude toward Law.

But what of written communication? The break with Law was initiated by a letter from Wesley. Indirect written communication between John Wesley and William Law continued sporadically over a period of years. The case was different with Böhler. When Böhler left for America, he sent a letter to Wesley admonishing him to continue in the faith.<sup>41</sup> Once Böhler returned from America, he met again with Wesley seven times. Then the two men parted. There was no further communication between them for over thirty years until Wesley wrote shortly before Böhler's death.

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<sup>38</sup> Wesley, 11:367.

<sup>39</sup> Tyerman, 179.

<sup>40</sup> Green, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Schmidt, 242.



Various dimensions of language were also at issue. Böhler spoke only German when he arrived in England. Had they not had Latin in common, the relationship could not have progressed so rapidly. The break with Law seemed to be a result of a difference in conceptual and experiential language. Wesley had experiences in Georgia that Law did not seem to understand. Law's affinity to mystical thought Wesley could not understand. Their communication was disrupted, so the personal relationship was terminated.

#### How Can the Influence of a Mentor be Assessed?

The only data available for assessing influence come from eyewitness accounts. Wesley scholars have offered their own opinions about the influence of Law and Böhler. Martin Schmidt indicated that Law's teachings about perfection, holiness, the renunciation of the world, and the idea that holiness and happiness go together were influential in Wesley's theology.<sup>42</sup> Robert Moore believed that John Wesley was able to change his image of God only through his relationship with Peter Böhler. The old image was an authority figure to be obeyed. The new image was a God who reached out to human beings, even imperfect human beings, in love. The desire for obedience was a response to God's love.<sup>43</sup>

The research showed that both William Law and Peter Böhler influenced John Wesley's spiritual development. William Law's teachings prescribed a model for a devout and holy life in obedience to God's law. It was a model John Wesley respected and used throughout his life. The conflict over the

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<sup>42</sup> Schmidt, 112.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Moore, 104.

inadequacies of Law's teachings even pushed Wesley toward Aldersgate. In Wesley's spiritual crisis, he learned that total obedience to God's law does not earn salvation. This realization led Wesley to Peter Böhler whose living example guided John Wesley to a conversion of the heart. The faith mediation of Peter Böhler and William Law combined to influence John Wesley's unique contribution of a balance between personal faith and active responsibility.

### Conclusion

New insights about John Wesley's relationships have come through examination of this historical material using a phenomenological method. When analyzed, John Wesley's relationships with William Law and Peter Böhler differed from first appearances. The relationships were complementary. Both were necessary in Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage toward Aldersgate.

Wesley biographers have generally overemphasized Peter Böhler's influence and underemphasized William Law's influence. If the continuation of Wesley's relationship with William Law is ignored, the break with Law is usually defined in terms of theological content. Law's influence is then assumed to be limited. By analyzing the Wesley-Law relationship from a perspective of faith mediation, the break can be explained in psychological terms. As a result, it can be seen that Wesley did not discard everything that Law believed. Current theory holds that characteristics of a mentor are usually internalized following a break in the relationship.<sup>44</sup> If that is the case, the full impact of Law's Christian Perfection and the influence of the mystics on Wesley's thought has yet to be assessed.

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<sup>44</sup> Levinson, 101.

The value of the method developed here is that it can be used to analyze other significant relationships of Wesley and the early Methodists. Accumulating all of the references to the Law and Böhler relationships in Wesley's Works was a most fruitful task. Having the perspectives of Law and Böhler was helpful, but it would have been possible to determine the unique form of the relationships from Wesley's accounts only. Questions left unanswered are: Who were other mediators of the faith for Wesley? How did Wesley's own role as mediator of the faith develop? How has Wesley's intentionality in relationships been passed on to contemporary Methodists? Future work will involve analysis of other significant Wesley relationships to uncover their patterns of faith mediation, including Wesley's own role as faith mediator.

Wesley's experience of faith mediation has illuminated the role of interpersonal relationships in faith formation. This historical study has revealed two forms of faith mediation and illustrated the significance of interpersonal relationships in John Wesley's growth in faith. The fact that these relationships happened at the time they did in the way they did was probably not coincidental. Both were related to the struggle and issues foremost in Wesley's mind. Both relationships were confrontive to Wesley's old patterns of thought, feeling, and action. In a sense, Wesley had something to learn from both William Law and Peter Böhler and was guided by some inner instinct (or by God's grace) into the relationships.

This final piece of the puzzle contains implications for mediating the faith through mentoring relationships:

Faith mediation can occur only if a person is open to the relationship. Persons who live in isolation cannot be influenced by relationships. John

Wesley sought out the learning he needed. He was willing to confront the challenge, critique, and guidance of William Law and Peter Böhler.

A variety of faith mediators are needed throughout a person's life. The nature of the mediating relationship changes depending on a person's development. Only a study of other Wesley relationships will reveal if there are further distinctions in his life. Comparison of the forms of Wesley's faith mediating relationships with results of contemporary research can help determine if those forms are age- or stage-related.

The selection of a mentor can be a conscious or unconscious choice. Persons may recognize or be drawn to someone who will help them resolve a life issue. John Wesley took the initiative in his encounters with William Law and Peter Böhler. Had Wesley passively waited for life experience, he might have missed the mediation of faith in these relationships. The experience of faith mediation may come because a person expects it. A person who believes God can work through relationships will be more likely to recognize this form of faith mediation.

The degree of influence of a mentor can be measured by the words and actions of the person influenced. Law's influence on Wesley can be observed in part through Wesley's writings and sermons, and Böhler's influence can be witnessed at Aldersgate. Perhaps the best evidence of the influence of Law and Böhler is Wesley's recognition and record of it. The mediating relationships were heightened by Wesley's awareness of the process.

The most resisted relationship may have the greatest influence. Points of conflict and resistance in a mentoring relationship often reveal the areas of inner struggle where growth is possible. John Wesley was a person of great persistence in confronting his inner issues. His struggle was intense, and his mentors responded to him accordingly.

Communication must be appropriate to the situation and the need. The communication patterns in the Wesley relationships were shaped by 18th century culture. Face-to-face communication, letters, published opinions, and second-hand information were all part of the development of Wesley's relationships. How contemporary culture and technology affects communication in current models of faith mediation is an issue that remains to be addressed.

William Law and Peter Böhler served as mentors for John Wesley, each in his own way. **Each was a mediator of the faith who through observation, discernment, and guidance provided others an opportunity to clarify their relationship with God, to focus their direction, and to shape their witness.** In addition to observation, discernment and guidance, both Law and Böhler served as teachers of new ideas, advisors in decision making, confronters of old patterns, and guides in new endeavors. Each was available to spend time with Wesley. Both Law and Böhler in their times of primary influence were willing to accept Wesley as he was. William Law's primary roles can be classified as intellectual, spiritual and vocational. He worked with Wesley regarding a theology of perfection and the practice of a holy life. Peter Böhler influenced Wesley in these areas. But Böhler was a strong personal and emotional role model as he led Wesley to a conversion of the heart. Both mentors provided the primary roles that John Wesley needed at the time.

This historical study provides the final piece of the puzzle by showing how God worked through John Wesley's relationships. In the end, mediating relationships are a gift of God. Persons enter into relationships, but God is the one who brings grace to the relationship as revealed in new challenges,

insights, and directions for life. William Law and Peter Böhler served as vehicles for the work of God, and John Wesley received the challenges they brought. William Law and Peter Böhler witness to the fact that persons have the capacity to be mediators of the faith. And John Wesley witnesses to the opportunity persons have to receive the grace of God through relationships. Mediating the faith spans time and space as a vehicle of God's grace.

## CHAPTER 5

### From Mentoring to Faith-Mentoring

#### Introduction

And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge.  
And he answered, saying:  
Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the  
nights.  
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.  
You would know in words that which you have always known in  
thought.  
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your  
dreams.  
. . . . The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.<sup>1</sup>

Assembling a picture puzzle is not always easy. At times, it appears to be deceptively simple. Then one discovers that several pieces have similar shape, dimension, and color. A kaleidoscope of pictures is possible as the pieces are placed in relationship to each other. In this puzzle, four concepts of mentoring that contribute to a vision of faith-mentoring have been gathered, and the pieces are waiting to be assembled.

The purpose of this chapter is to create a vision of faith-mentoring and to illustrate its importance. The insights from the literature review, the empirical research project, the discussion of psychoanalytic theory, and the historical case study will be reviewed to see what contributions they provide. These contributions will be utilized in shaping a concept of faith-mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> Gibran, 54-55.

Questions to be addressed in this chapter are: What is the nature of faith-mentoring? Why is faith-mentoring important?

Guide: The First Piece of the Puzzle

The study of nurturing relationships described in business, educational, and religious literature (Chapter 1) resulted in the first piece of the puzzle.

A mentor is:

**a guide who journeys through life with another, pointing out landmarks, modeling alternatives, supporting choices, and interpreting life events. All of this is done in the service of facilitating another person's discovery and definition of self.**

The primary role of mentor in this definition is guide, one who is important to persons on a journey. Pointing out, modeling, supporting, and interpreting are powerful action words. The guide may not predetermine the outcome of the journey, but certainly affects choices made along the way.

The interview data reviewed in Chapter 2 reinforced this concept of guide. In one interview, a young black woman described the guidance of her mother:

I attended church and listened only because of my mother. I didn't want to be a hypocrite. She never gave up. She instilled a conscience in me, a desire to do what's right. She hoped something would rub off and I would make my own decision about my faith . . . . We are closer now that we share the same religion. I have a chance now to be with her forever. Because of our shared faith, we will always be together.<sup>2</sup>

This young woman graphically characterized her mother as "making the best of the little she had," and "always following the rules; never lying to get ahead." The mother helped the young woman set up her apartment, taught her how to budget and manage credit cards, and provided standards for relationships with

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<sup>2</sup> Interview Respondent, Black female, participating lay person, age 26.



men. The daughter expressed great respect for her mother's role in teaching her the skills necessary for coping with life.

Respect for the influential person was by far the most frequent feeling expressed in the interviews (64.1% of respondents). Others expressed feelings of admiration and trust. If a guide is a person whom one respects, admires, and trusts, then the guide's words and actions hold the power of influence. Decisions will be made based on what landmarks are pointed out, what alternatives are modeled, what choices are supported, and how life events are interpreted.

An example of the influence of a guide on life changes comes from a previously-churched woman. She described a new sense of self-confidence resulting from a relationship with a supportive friend,

I grew up to be classic, modest and oppressive in my dress. She influenced me to wear colors not on my chart. I have changed how I look at myself and choose to show myself with others. I now am comfortable with how I feel in what I wear. I have new confidence in myself intellectually and emotionally.

The support and feedback of this influential person facilitated the young woman's discovery and definition of herself. In addition to words and actions, guides also participate in decision-making by what is communicated non-verbally by their presence.

The image of a guide who journeys with another is the most important theme in the discussion of mentoring relationships in the literature. The guide relates to the whole person, including intellect, emotions, physical and spiritual well-being. While a guide maintains some detachment in order to be

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<sup>3</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 24.

clear about the direction of the journey, interaction with the travelers does occur. The guide notes the landmarks, reveals the choices to be made, and protects the travelers from danger. Another guide with the same group of travelers may see the journey from a different perspective and, thereby, point out different landmarks, choices, and dangers.

### Model: The Second Piece of the Puzzle

From the empirical research project on the nature of influential relationships (Chapter 2) comes the second piece of the puzzle and another definition of mentor:

**a person, who by word, action, and presence, models a meaningful lifestyle, clarifies important life issues, and provides guidance for deepening spirituality in a caring and accepting environment.**

The empirical research revealed the primary role of influential persons to be modeling in a caring and accepting relationship. The action words here are models, clarifies, and provides guidance. It is already clear that the definitions from the first two pieces of the puzzle overlap. Both use the terms guidance and modeling. In addition, little difference exists between interpreting life events and clarifying life issues. However, each definition was constructed separately as a result of a unique research approach, and each carries a different emphasis as a result. The central role in this definition is modeling.

As the research showed, persons sometimes choose a different approach than the one modeled. At other times, they want to be like the influential person, to acquire the skills they admire. One Hispanic man shared both points of view:

**My father was very dynamic, a great preacher, and very humane. His weakness was that he was poor in the area of**

"politics" within the church. He taught me the essence of the Christian faith. At one time, I became somewhat liberal in outlook. Because of his influence, I find myself digging into my conservative evangelical roots. My father's influence was tremendous in a positive way, but also negative. I have not made up my mind about going into ministry because of the unjust treatment of my father by the institution.<sup>4</sup>

This man grew up wanting to be like his father whom he admired. Yet the negative experience of seeing his father treated unjustly has strongly impacted the son. He is still struggling with his vocational choice at forty-five years of age.

Modeling spirituality was mentioned by 66.7% of the persons interviewed (Table 5). Modeling spirituality ranked first in the description of the role of male influential persons and second in the description of the role of female influential persons (Table 6). Those interviewed seemed to understand spirituality as a growing relationship with God, a relationship that provided a frame of reference for making meaning of their lives. Modeling spirituality meant influencing spiritual growth by sharing religious assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and spiritual practices.

When asked what her influential person gave her, one minister replied:

She nurtures me to search for a spiritual base deep within, to look for a spirituality that reflects the coming together of the inner and outer, an integrated spirituality. She gave me specific resources for meditation, communication, and listening skills. She gave me a multitude of concepts, values, and ideas. I am learning to trust myself and not run from boundaries. I am much stronger now, much more centered. I am farther along in living out of my own core<sup>5</sup> rather than according to other's expectations and strokes.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview Respondent, Hispanic male, participating lay person, age 45.

<sup>5</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 39.

This woman had always experienced spirituality within the boundaries of the traditional church. Through her influential person, she met a new circle of friends including a number of alienated persons "who still held spiritual values and were cultivating their own spirituality." Modeling spirituality in this case included sharing resources, friends, and ideas, as well as affirmation of the inner search. For this influential person, spirituality was a lifestyle to be embodied, a way of life reflecting consistency between lifestyle and values, a trait several persons were seeking to acquire.

This second piece of the puzzle emphasizes modeling as a dimension of mentoring. The importance of the modeling role is accentuated by the different forms of modeling. Eight sub-categories were needed to include all of the research data (Table 5). Influential persons modeled spirituality, lifestyle, values, their own growth, vocation, intimacy, femininity/masculinity, and honesty. The predominant image for the modeling role is apprenticeship, one person looking over the shoulders of another. By accompanying a mentor on her or his journey, apprentices of all ages learn skills necessary for their own journeys. Looking over a mentor's shoulders implies spending time together, communicating with one another, sharing life experience. An openness on the part of the mentor is assumed, a willingness to live under scrutiny. A sense of security is necessary when one is likely to have assumptions or actions called into question. And what if the apprentice identifies so closely with the model that individual boundaries are lost? Modeling exhibits one person's responses to life experiences, but does not prescribe responses for another. The modeling role is no small task for those who share themselves for the growth of another.

### Guarantor: The Third Piece of the Puzzle

From psychoanalytic theory comes the affirmation that human growth is relational. A third piece of the puzzle emerged from interpreting influential relationships through the perspective of psychoanalytic theory (Chapter 3). A mentor is:

**a guarantor for another person's growth in a trusting relationship and accepting environment. A guarantor frees persons to see themselves in new ways, to cope with threatening feelings, and to test new behaviors.**

The term guarantor has been borrowed from Ross Snyder to represent the type of relationship needed for growth and/or healing according to the psychoanalytic theorists. Though Snyder is not himself psychoanalytic in orientation, his image of guarantor is very fitting. By recognizing and accepting persons as they are, the guarantor provides opportunities to awaken the possibilities within them. Modeling and guidance are also part of the guarantor role, but the major emphasis here is on the freedom that comes from a trusting relationship and an accepting environment. Persons are freed to grow when they experience the respect of a guarantor who supports their search to find themselves. Maria Harris described this role in relationship to teaching as the grace of power:

each human being has the vocation to be a subject who not only can act, but who has the responsibility to act in the world. All genuine teaching is implicitly directed to help learners come to this place of power . . . . Because taking responsibility for one's own power can be a frightening prospect, a teacher must be the learner's guarantor in such situations that accepting such power is the right thing to do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay on the Theology of Teaching (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 81.

The results of the empirical research on the nature of influential relationships substantiate this claim. The quality of caring ranked first among the qualities of influential persons; it was attributed to influential persons a total of 93 times in the interviews. Accepting ranked second, with 79 responses. Caring and accepting were named as important qualities of influential persons a total of 172 times in 78 interviews (Table 2). It is not surprising, then, that the role of caring-accepting ranked first along with modeling spirituality, both roles named by 66.7% of the persons interviewed (Table 5). A previously-churched man who saw family relationships as being of primary importance in his life talked about the unselfish acceptance of his ex-wife:

She gave me love. It was the first time I had ever experienced love. I didn't realize it until the relationship was over. She taught me how to care, to not be afraid to show that I care. We are still best of friends. She gives me her respect and support.

The caring relationship with this influential person continues although the two are no longer married. The growth of this man is supported by the caring and respect of the ex-wife. Affirmation of the worth and ability of a person, along with opportunities for that ability to develop, are central to the guarantor role.

Another example of the importance of caring and accepting comes from a lay man who discussed his friend:

He is enormously open and accepting. I can tell him anything and he wouldn't be surprised or judgmental. I was surprised when I saw him three weeks ago. He greeted me with hugs and kisses. He lets me know he loves me. I am a very judgmental person with a passion about how things should be done. He calls me to task by

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<sup>7</sup> Interview Respondent, Black male, previously-churched, age 39.

finding good things about the person or thing to counter my judgment.<sup>8</sup>

The influential person created a caring environment in which the man could express himself freely, but still was able to confront him about his judgmental nature. This is one of the few interview responses which revealed the physical aspect of caring.

The third piece of the puzzle from psychoanalytic theory is guarantor. A guarantor is one who guarantees -- guarantees that persons have entered a caring and accepting environment; guarantees that the relationship is trustworthy; guarantees that any feeling, idea, or question is valid; guarantees that persons can be affirmed as they grow in their own ways; guarantees that there will be opportunities for discovering gifts and abilities; guarantees persons' worthiness. Out of this guarantee comes empowerment and security to know oneself, to grow, to change, and to share oneself with others.

#### Mediator: The Fourth Piece of the Puzzle

An historical case study of two of John Wesley's relationships prior to his conversion experience at Aldersgate provides a fourth piece of the puzzle (Chapter 4). A mentor is:

**a mediator of the faith who through observation, discernment, and guidance provides others an opportunity to clarify their relationship with God, to focus their direction, and to shape their witness.**

Mediating is the primary role of the mentor in this definition. Aspects of the role include observation of the other person's life experiences,

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<sup>8</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian male, participating lay person, age 45.

discernment of God at work through those experiences, and guidance toward a deeper spirituality. The mediator is one who stands in the middle, the one who facilitates another's growing relationship with other persons and with God.

The study of Wesley's relationships illustrated how different types of mediators may be needed in a person's life. Law and Böhler each made a unique contribution to Wesley's growth in his relationship with God. Reading Law's writings convinced Wesley "more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view."<sup>9</sup> Wesley's search for justification intensified through the challenges brought by the relationship with Böhler. Finally, Böhler brought witnesses who "testified of their own personal experience that a true living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past and present sins."<sup>10</sup> With this witness Wesley resolved to seek faith renouncing any dependence on his own works, trusting totally in God's grace.<sup>11</sup> Meeting these witnesses encouraged Wesley along the path to Aldersgate:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the **Epistle to the Romans**. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved

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<sup>9</sup> Curnock, 1:466.

<sup>10</sup> Curnock, 1:468.

<sup>11</sup> Curnock, 1:468.



me from the law of sin and death.<sup>12</sup>

The mediation of Law and Böhler brought Wesley to a turning point in his life. This experience did not end the doubts, the temptation, or the struggle, but provided the impetus and direction for Wesley to move forward in his ministry.

The empirical research data also reflect the mediation of God's grace through significant relationships. One woman who attempts to follow the teachings of Christ in her life described her pastor:

He reminds me of the apostle John. His has lived a whole life of loving, realizing times of difficulty, but at peace with himself. He has an unending ability to see God as loving, and loves flows out of him. He worked with me through difficult times so that I felt a powerful sense of forgiveness and the love of God. He just kept being there.<sup>13</sup>

Modeling, discernment, and guidance are apparent in the witness of this mediator. The consistency and durability of the relationship are of primary importance to the growth of the woman. An influential person who functioned as a mediator was discussed in this way:

Everything I know I learned by my friend being who she was, being with me, sharing herself with me. She invited bonding that allowed for my growth. She taught me values about life, people and relationships. I was able to work through feelings of family rejection. I learned a new meaning of the word love. Love is letting go.<sup>14</sup>

This influential person provided mediation between past and present, between rejection and acceptance, between being loved and loving.

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<sup>12</sup> Curnock, 1:469.

<sup>13</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 30s.

<sup>14</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 30s.

Mediators of the faith are those persons who are willing to open their lives so that God can work through them to facilitate the spiritual growth of another. Wesley's relationships with Law and Böhler illustrated that it may take more than one mentor joining hands to mediate the faith across the lifetime of one person's spiritual journey. Mediators are those who walk quietly with another person, hand-in-hand.

This piece of the puzzle has produced the image of mentor as mediator, the one who stands between -- between what one is and what one hopes to be. An appropriate image for mediator is a person with hands outstretched, a living bridge. When a group of persons forms a circle by joining hands, each person in the circle becomes the mediator between two other persons. Sometimes there is a gap which cannot be spanned without the circle stretching, or a new person entering the circle to fill the gap. A mediator is a bridge between persons, or between persons and God.

#### Faith Mentor: The Picture Assembled

The term mentoring has been used throughout this book for nurturing relationships. Faith mentor is now being proposed as a name for those persons who become mediators of God's grace for others. According to Sharon Parks, faith is the activity of making meaning out of life in relation to the ultimate.

Faith is more adequately recognized as the activity of seeking and composing meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience. Faith is a broad, generic human phenomenon. To be human is to dwell in faith, to dwell in one's meaning -- one's conviction of the ultimate character of truth, of self, of world, of cosmos.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Parks, xv.

Parks later concluded that "the pattern we ultimately depend upon for our existence functions as 'God' for us."<sup>16</sup> If the term faith represents the activity of making meaning in relation to the ultimate and the term mentoring represents a nurturing relationship, then faith-mentoring is a nurturing relationship which facilitates the activity of shaping the ultimate meaning of life.

Faith and mentor are combined in this way in an attempt to extend the understanding of mentor beyond its current limits based on the assumption that God is an active participant in faith-mentoring. Therefore, a faith mentor is any person who becomes a vehicle for the expression of God's grace in the life of other persons. A faith mentor provides nurture for another's life journey toward a growing relationship with God.

The roles of guide, model, guarantor, and mediator have come together like pieces of a puzzle to illuminate a picture of faith mentor. In truth, the pieces are more than four in number, for each role brings a myriad of possibilities. Multi-colored shapes are strewn on the table. Pieces with similar colors and patterns are grouped together. But the picture is becoming more complicated. A faith mentor is an active participant in the relationship, but maintains some detachment. While supporting the growth of another, the faith mentor may also be confrontive. Faith-mentoring usually occurs informally, but can also be a designated relationship. The faith mentor allows persons space to grow in their own unique ways, but serves to form persons within a given faith tradition.

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<sup>16</sup> Parks, 17.

With these insights about faith-mentoring, the picture is assembled, but not complete. The border pieces are missing from this puzzle. The picture is open to further growth and definition as God works through faith mentors for the renewal of individual lives and the life of faith communities. A unifying definition of faith mentor summarizes the assembled picture:

**A faith mentor is a co-creator with God who, as a living representative of God's grace, participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons.**

The importance and possibilities of faith-mentoring begin to emerge from this definition.

### The Importance and Possibilities of Faith-Mentoring

Faith-mentoring holds sociological, psychological, and theological importance. Some of the possibilities are discussed here in the form of five affirmative statements. Support for each statement comes from the research in the first part of the dissertation.

**1. Faith-mentoring affirms the contribution and worth of all persons in many different roles. No particular form of faith-mentoring is designated as normative. The criteria of faith-mentoring are the quality of the relationship, the duration and depth of the relationship, and the growth of the individual in faith.**

The empirical research data (Chapter 2) illustrated the breadth of possibility for influential persons to become faith mentors. Family representatives in the influential person category included nine mothers, seven fathers, two grandmothers and two grandfathers, four spouses, four ex-girlfriends, and two aunts. Helping professionals included ten ministers, eight teachers and six counselors, while twenty-four friends were named as influential persons. These relationships were further diversified by ethnicity, gender, age, vocation, religious status, education, and life experience.

Out of 78 respondents, 61 persons (75.6%) reported that their influential persons affected their relationship with God or their religious life in some way. These influential persons were faith mentors. The influential persons as faith mentors facilitated persons' search to make meaning of life -- relationally, vocationally, and spiritually.

Most of these influential persons did not consciously intend to influence faith journeys. God was at work in the relationships in unique ways, as illustrated by a young man who discussed the religious influence of his teacher:

He made me believe that something exists, a superior being, matter or energy. And he taught me how to meditate -- a spiritual experience that helps me believe in a higher power.<sup>17</sup>

This man did not grow up in a faith community. He felt something was missing in his life, a spiritual void. In a college class on the state of consciousness, he learned how to meditate and now considers himself to be a religious person in terms of "looking for meaning, and becoming closer to the source who created me." A teacher served as faith mentor by nurturing his spiritual growth.

A second example from the empirical study is the account of a woman who discussed a friend as an influential person.

The influence that my friend has had on my religious life is the influence of a dialogue partner who will support my hunches so I'm not scared to talk about them. Together we come up with amazing stuff through two different angles on religion and God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interview Respondent, Hispanic male, previously-churched, age 24.

<sup>18</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 24.

The faith-mentoring roles of guarantor and mediator are apparent in this description. The open, accepting, and secure environment freed the respondent to pursue her faith journey in creative ways.

Another woman reported meeting her influential person when they worked together as social workers.

My friend was a vehicle for entry into the church, to study theology. We met at a time when I was looking for something, for direction. He influenced the way I think about God acting in my life and in history. Our relationship strengthened my relationship with God.<sup>19</sup>

The mediating role of the faith mentor is apparent here. The influential person affected the woman's relationship with God and was a vehicle for entry into further spiritual growth. The timeliness of the meeting (when the woman was "looking for something") is one indicator of God working through interpersonal relationships to further faith journeys.

A final example comes from a one-time encounter of a man with a poet who made a powerful impact on the respondent's faith journey.

He helped me clarify a sense of connection with the earth. He got me in touch with grief as an expression or source of grace that I didn't know existed. It opened up a whole new realm in which I could know God.<sup>20</sup>

Each of these examples -- teacher, dialogue partner, friend, poet/teacher -- illustrates the importance and possibility of God at work through interpersonal relationships. A variety of persons in different roles served as faith mentors. Whether or not the roles of guide, model, guarantor,

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<sup>19</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, participating lay person, age 33.

<sup>20</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian male, religious professional, age 42.

or mediator were most apparent, each influential person was a faith mentor, a co-creator with God in the growth of another person.

These examples reveal that faith-mentoring holds the possibility of freeing persons to use the gifts they have received in order to work toward wholeness and growth. Faith mentors are the mediators of revelation:

Communion with others will necessarily move us to remove barriers, lessen whatever pain we can, and design modes of human being-together that acknowledge that all being has the ontological vocation to be subject; that not only are the humans revealed as subjects, but the world itself stands as subject to be accepted, to be revered, to be loved.<sup>21</sup> Revelation will thus impel the work of justice, until all are one.

Through faith-mentoring, persons are called to open their eyes to God at work in the world, to join in the ongoing creation of new life, and to live with compassion.

## **2. Faith-mentoring takes place in a variety of settings that shape the content of the relationship.**

Influential relationships occur in a variety of settings for both women and men. According to the seventy-eight respondents in the empirical study (Chapter 2), the content or substance of the relationship revolved around relational growth in interpersonal skills (mentioned by 68 respondents), identity definition (65 respondents), growth in awareness of talents or abilities (61 respondents), and religious growth (59 respondents).

While the content of the relationship often centered on relational growth and identity development, shared interests were the primary characteristic of the interpersonal relationship. Sixty-three persons (80.8%) indicated they

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<sup>21</sup> Harris, 76-77.

shared similar interests or experiences with their influential persons. These interests or experiences were shared in a variety of larger settings like faith community, school, work, home, and leisure time activities. But the experiences within each setting were very diverse.

For example, those persons who met their influential persons within a faith community setting described camp trainings, youth events, retreats, worship, Bible classes, meetings, and counseling. One lay man described the way he met his influential person.

We met at a church conference. He then came to my church to discuss the possibility of organizing a Hispanic worship service. I was dubious of his laid back manner, but I interviewed him for the job. He proved himself to me after six months. He has had a profound effect in redirecting my thinking about the church.<sup>22</sup>

This cross-cultural faith-mentoring relationship began in the setting of a church conference and then moved to a local church. The relationship grew from a supervisory relationship into a friendship with an influential person who affirmed the man's gifts and challenged him to further growth in his faith.

Several persons met their influential persons at school, as teachers or student friends. Five persons, like this religious professional, sought out specific teachers:

We met when I went to visit the school. I walked in and she gave me a tour. We got acquainted in class, and later we worked together. But I took the initiative to get into her schedule.<sup>23</sup>

This influential person was identified within the school context as a significant

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<sup>22</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian male, participating lay person, age 59.

<sup>23</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 35.



role model, an ordained clergywoman. As faith mentor, she helped the young woman explore what ministry was about so that the respondent could make an informed decision about her own vocational commitment.

Work settings are also places where faith-mentoring occurs. Another religious professional described how he met his influential person:

I had just begun my position in youth ministry. My friend was President of the congregation. After the first couple of weeks, he invited me out to lunch and shared his understanding of the church. He offered his help and support.<sup>24</sup>

This faith-mentoring relationship began in a work setting. But as the relationship developed, the influential person also became important to the this man for his sense of family relationships and for his acceptance.

Faith-mentoring happens in the home. One woman described her father as a "mild-mannered, gentle man." She continued:

He had a definite value system which came across by living example. I had a general identification with what he thought and how he lived. His steadfast belief kept me in church. I am in church because of him.<sup>25</sup>

Persons who discussed family members often talked about them as living examples, faith mentors who lived out what they believed in their actions.

Sometimes faith mentors are found at leisure time activities. One man indicated that he met his influential person at a scuba diving class.<sup>26</sup> This faith mentor enhanced the young man's reverence for life, by sharing her life with him. She helped him clarify his life direction, purpose, and meaning. He has come to realize she is a source of definition and strength.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian male, religious professional, age 31.

<sup>25</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, Participating lay person, age 61.

<sup>26</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian male, previously-churched, age 34.

Faith mentors can be found in settings like faith community, school, work, home, and leisure time activities. Wherever persons make connections that enhance the meaning making activity of life, faith-mentoring is taking place.

Faith-mentoring is particularly important in the larger cultural setting of the United States where many persons have now opted out of formal affiliation with a faith community. Individual religion is common in the United States. The data from the empirical research project showed that both church and previously-church persons see themselves as being in relationship with God, but they often express that this relationship does not need the support or mediation of a faith community. Demographic characteristics like age, sex, and social circumstances, rather than belief, have separated persons from the faith community.<sup>27</sup> The previously-church find themselves in an expanding context of "community-based individualism," the group of those who have abandoned participation in a faith community.<sup>28</sup> Previously-church persons want to be valued. They want to be heard, but they are not inclined to return to the faith community.

For those persons who have a past which predisposes them to stay "in," the church will be redefined over time to take account of the changes which growth and the circumstance of living make inevitable. Without such redefinition, the church cannot last over a lifetime as a community of orientation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David S. Steward, "Why Do People Congregate?" Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 82.

<sup>28</sup> Steward, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Steward, 83.

In the context of a secularized world, a faith mentor who is grounded in a faith community has the opportunity to serve as a bridge between the faith community and the world. Faith mentors who nurture persons in their meaning making can serve as guide, model, guarantor, or mediator to those who are alienated.

Faith-mentoring attempts to recapture the spirit of Methodism's early beginnings among those who were alienated from a faith community. John Wesley emphasized the dignity of humanity and the possibility of all persons being made perfect in this life through God's grace. Albert Outler expressed the power of Wesley's movement:

From Methodist preaching, men and women heard about God's high evaluation of their own human dignity -- of the love that motivated the Incarnation and accepted the Cross. And then, in weekly rounds of the Methodist societies, they experienced this special dignity in newly personal circumstances, new experiences of peer-group equality -- with real group involvement and actual social responsibility . . . . Such men and women found themselves sloughing off their shackles of servility, and becoming the available leadership cadre for one of the most effective, least disruptive social revolutions on record. They emerged as a new class -- men and women with a new dignity conferred on them, not by birth or wealth or power, but by God and their Christian brethren [sic].<sup>30</sup>

Many women and men found new dignity in the Methodist movement and were empowered to assume leadership for social change. The importance of faith-mentoring is to bring dignity to persons of any age, race, class, or gender in many settings so that they may contribute to a more wholesome and just life for all. Faith-mentoring holds the possibility of creating leadership for a revolution which will bring peace and justice to a troubled world.

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<sup>30</sup> Albert Outler, Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), 30.

### 3. A continuum of faith-mentoring relationships is possible.

Mediating relationships range from an inadvertent insight of another person to a covenanted spiritual direction relationship. The possibilities are endless.

Even brief encounters can be mediating relationships. Regardless of the duration of the relationship, strong emotions were generated as participants in the empirical research began to reflect on the relationships in their lives. Many were grateful to have an opportunity to remember a relationship that had been taken for granted.

One woman shared her reflections on a brief relationship with a friend who had just died:

I think living by charity is important. It is selfish in that helping is rewarding to me. I believe that God is within people and not separate from them. I sometimes envied my friend, the security that come to her from her religion. She took me to Temple with her. I enjoy the services, but they have no meaning.<sup>31</sup>

Even though participation in a faith community had lost its meaning for this woman, the faith of her friend had significantly influenced her life. The relationship was brief, but the life of the friend had a profound effect. The friend had been a mediator of God's grace.

At the other end of the continuum are intentional long-term relationships. One woman described a relationship with an influential person who was her spiritual director.

She is unassuming, extremely gifted and has profound insight. The only time we disagreed was when I wanted to be dependent on

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<sup>31</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 50s.

her. Once when I wanted to come home from Central America, she left the decision to me. I was upset that she would not tell me what to do, but later I discovered it was a good thing. She taught me to be independent, to take risks, and to be responsible for my own decisions.<sup>32</sup>

Through this long-term covenanted relationship, the influential person affirmed the woman's gifts, taught her that prayer is a way of life, and encouraged her to risk involvement in justice issues. As a result, one woman's faith journey has taken her around the world -- freed by her faith mentor to minister to those who are suffering.

The Wesley study (Chapter 4) revealed the importance of two very different relationships in the life of John Wesley. The relationship with Peter Böhler was brief and intense. The two men shared mutual friends and interests. The relationship was important for Wesley because it occurred at a time of seeking in his life. The Law relationship was influential in the beginning because of the similarity of interests and Wesley's desire for Law to be his teacher. After the breakdown in the face-to-face relationship, Law continued to influence Wesley. This influence came from the conflict between the two men which forced Wesley to struggle with the issues between them. The conflict ultimately affected John Wesley's theology and ministry.

These examples illustrate the importance of faith-mentoring by recognizing the possibilities of a variety of relationships. The life of the woman who worked with students reflected the belief that God is within people, and the spiritual director helped a woman take responsibility for herself. William Law and Peter Böhler contributed to John Wesley's spiritual

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<sup>32</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 64.

journey by challenging Wesley to define and to live through his own faith. All of these persons served as faith mentors, opening themselves for God to work through them to facilitate the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of others.

**4. Faith-mentoring is shaped by the nature and vision of a faith community.**

Faith-mentoring cannot be accomplished without God's grace working through interpersonal relationships. A faith community supports and nurtures faith mentors by keeping alive the dream of a universal community in which relationships of love and justice are the norm. A faith community serves as a touchstone for faith mentors.<sup>33</sup> The genuineness and value of faith-mentoring is evaluated by a faith community, and individual discernment is measured against the vision of a faith community.

John Wesley was influenced in his significant relationships in a community of faith. But at the same time, Wesley was contributing to the faith journeys of others through his own faith-mentoring. What John Wesley proclaimed was tested by its rootedness in Scripture, its illumination in tradition, its realization in experience, and its confirmation in reason.<sup>34</sup> And Wesley's participation in the small group setting of a Select Society provided a venue for accountability with those who knew him best. Participation in a faith community provides faith mentors with these same opportunities for accountability.

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<sup>33</sup> Touchstone is defined as "a type of black stone formerly used to test the purity of gold or silver by the streak left on it when it was rubbed with the metal"; and "any test or criterion for determining genuineness or value." Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College ed., 1954.

<sup>34</sup> Outler, 42.

faith community provides faith mentors with these same opportunities for accountability.

It was evident in the results of the four approaches to research that persons who are not part of a faith community also serve as faith mentors. Any person can serve as a vehicle for God's grace, participating in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons. Those persons outside a faith community who nurture others in their attempt to find meaning for life are not faith mentors in isolation. These faith mentors have been shaped in relational, educational, and sometimes religious contexts. They are persons who attempt to live life with integrity and have some insight into the search for meaning.

Wherever they are found, faith mentors are called to be incarnational, to discern the will of God and to embody God's love in social action. Wesley, as faith mentor, believed that "outward witness in daily living is the necessary confirmation of any inward experience of inward faith."<sup>35</sup> Faith-mentoring is a challenge to reclaim John Wesley's understanding that social responsibility is the natural outcome of inward piety. They are one and the same. Faith mentors witness by their very lives to the grace they have been given. Relationships at work, at school, on the street, in the community all have the potential of being faith-mentoring relationships. And the faithful witness and honest searching of persons outside a faith community can be a call to renewal for a faith community itself.

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<sup>35</sup> Outler, 25.

## 5. Faith-mentoring shapes the nature of a community of faith and its practice of ministry.

Faith-mentoring is not only a challenge to give social witness to God's love, but provides an opportunity for renewal within a faith community itself. Faith-mentoring calls a faith community to assess its own actions in light of God's will and to reclaim the vision of a universal community of love and justice. Only when persons within a faith community have experienced the affirmation and rebirth that can come through the nurture of faith-mentoring can the quiet revolution begin. If a faith community is to be a messenger of God's love:

we must ourselves believe the gospel that we preach. And we must match our belief with a ceaseless struggle to understand it, to communicate it, to persuade others of the truth that liberates, the love that dignifies, the peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away.<sup>36</sup>

To witness to the "truth that liberates" and the "love that dignifies," faith mentors act as guide, model, guarantor, and mediator. A faith-mentoring relationship empowers persons to love themselves, as well as their neighbors. A faith mentor is a co-creator with God in the ongoing process of creation through growth and renewal. With this view, life and growth in faith can be seen as part of an ongoing, interwoven, creative process with an emphasis on the mutuality of growth. Theologically, faith-mentoring is separated from an hierarchical order of creation. All persons are affirmed for their part in influential relationships and their contribution to the creation of new life.

To be partners in relationship with God requires that persons open their

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<sup>36</sup> Outler, 47.



lives to God. To do this is to live life as a prayer, an offering of gratitude for all that has been given. Faith mentors serve as role models by offering their talents and abilities for the growth of others. Through the grace of God evident in them, faith mentors make the connections that unify persons, one with another. God is at work in the world creating new life through interpersonal relationships. Faith mentors are the weavers of community, those who with outstretched hands unite those who are separated. Then, joining the hand of the person on the left with the hand of the person on the right, a faith mentor is free to move to another gap in the circle, once again making a connection for life-giving community.

#### Conclusion

A final personal example illustrates how a faith mentor mediates God's grace across time and space. Twenty-one years ago I met the woman who was to become my faith mentor and friend. She was my seminary adviser, and I was her student. Her strength attracted and threatened me. The strength that attracted me was an openness to listen. She was available. In the evening, I would toss a pebble at her window, and she would let me into her apartment building to talk. The strength that threatened, yet nurtured, me was her ability to confront issues directly. The life issues have changed over the last twenty years, but my friend has always been there to challenge, support and guide.

My teacher became guide, model, guarantor, and mediator for me. Through the years she has dreamed with me, cried with me, and laughed with me. She encouraged me and pushed me -- pushed me harder than anyone else ever has. She asked questions. She gave advice. She helped me financially, and she gave me love. All of the life experiences, all of the decisions, all of

the joys and pains were part of a spiritual journey that became my story. And my story was given the freedom to unfold in community with a sister of the faith. I made all my own mistakes, but she walked by my side even when we lived far apart. The time came when she was no longer an authority figure. She is my friend. God was present in this friendship and is present still. Through her, I experienced the mediation of God's grace, and I have become more than I ever dreamed as a result.

This chapter ends with a vision of faith mentor, the person I most want to be. Some of the border pieces of the puzzle have come together and the picture that appears is my faith mentor inviting me to share my journey with her:

Come sit a spell with me  
and just be there by my side  
silently touching each other's thought,  
myth spinning what it means to be.

What is it that causes two souls  
to touch each other so intimately,  
to share a silent journey  
bringing life where pain used to be.

It's a mystery most magnificent  
how two friends in space and intimacy  
came to discover the other,  
and set each other free.

So come and sit a spell with me  
to celebrate in joy and awe  
a friendship that continues to deepen  
in truth and mutuality.

## CHAPTER 6

### From Theory to Practice

#### Introduction

Hush, I pray you!  
What if this friend happen to be -- God?<sup>1</sup>

Faith-mentoring is a gift of God's love incarnate in interpersonal relationships. Faith mentors are vehicles of God's grace. In Chapter 5, an inclusive vision of faith-mentoring was constructed using information gleaned from various research approaches. A faith mentor participates in the co-creation of life in the interconnected and complementary roles of guide, model, guarantor, and mediator.

The purpose of this chapter is to develop further the picture of faith-mentoring by addressing these issues: How are dimensions of faith-mentoring informed by current theory and research results? What metaphors of faith-mentoring serve to illustrate its multi-dimensional nature and its possibility? What is the role of a faith community in support and nurture of these formative interpersonal relationships? Scenes depicting the practice of faith-mentoring are beginning to form the borders of the puzzle.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning, "Fears and Scruples," The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, ed. Geoffrey Cumberlege (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1946), 533.

### Dimensions of Faith-Mentoring

Drawing on the four approaches to research, a definition of faith-mentoring emerged in Chapter 5, but faith-mentoring is multi-dimensional. The intent here is to explore three interrelated dimensions of faith-mentoring in order to add depth and texture to the picture. Research results from this work and current theory are used for enhancement. Faith-mentoring is relational, incarnational, and contextual.

#### Relational

A faith mentor is a **co-creator with God** who, as a living representative of God's grace, participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons.

Faith-mentoring is relational. Faith mentors are persons in relationship with God and with other persons as co-creators. From the first day of a person's life, relationships are part of the growth process. Each of the psychoanalytic theorists (Chapter 3) discussed the importance of early relationships in shaping future interpersonal interactions. And yet, persons are not necessarily doomed to an unhappy life if their early years do not provide healthy relationships. If, as the Eriksons suggested, a person does not develop basic trust early in life, trust issues can be resolved through later adult relationships.<sup>2</sup> Faith-mentoring provides such an opportunity for growth and healing. Changes in self-perception and behavior occur through these transformative interpersonal relationships.

Faith-mentoring relationships serve this transforming purpose by nurturing persons in the activity of making meaning. Robert Evans described transformative growth:

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<sup>2</sup> Erikson and Erikson, 254.

Transformation can never be simply created because transformation is not a possession. Transformation is a gift which can be celebrated and cared for by stewards. Transformation is not hierarchical or authoritarian; it is egalitarian and reciprocal. It requires the support of a community. The process of transformation retains an element of mystery that is beyond our control and beyond our complete comprehension . . . . Transformation is a quality of relationship among the persons in community who are radically open to the Transcendent. Transformation is the transpersonal embodiment of God's grace that seeks justice and reconciliation for all.<sup>3</sup>

Faith mentors, as co-creators with God, participate in nurturing relationships in which the potential for transformation exists.

The research results reflect the transformative possibilities of faith-mentoring relationships. The conflict with William Law and the friendship with Peter Böhler brought John Wesley to the moment when he was "radically open to the Transcendent."<sup>4</sup> He came to a turning point in his life at Aldersgate (Chapter 4). "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ."<sup>5</sup> At Aldersgate, Wesley experienced in his heart what he had known in his mind.

The empirical research (Chapter 2) revealed that the impact of Böhler's friendship on Wesley was not an isolated case. Friendship often serves as a vehicle for faith-mentoring. Twenty-four persons (30.8%) named friends who were influential persons, and twenty of these friends (83.3%) influenced persons' relationship with God. Leslie Weatherhead described the transforming nature of friendship:

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<sup>3</sup> Evans discussed the vision, criteria, dynamic, and components of transformative education in Alice Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans, and William Bean Kennedy, Pedagogies for the Non-Poor (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 283.

<sup>4</sup> Evans, Evans, and Kennedy, 283.

<sup>5</sup> Curnock, 1:478.

Friendship . . . will make us like the friend we admire and see much of. Merely to enter the presence of some people is to go into an atmosphere in which we become our best selves; in which nothing unworthy could be done. To live in that presence would make us new beings.<sup>6</sup>

Weatherhead's description provides an image of growth possible in a faith-mentoring relationship.

Transformation through relationships may take a long time. An example comes from one woman's description of a ten-year relationship with a minister she first met in a youth group. When the woman's husband was in an accident, the minister came to be with her at the hospital. She described the ongoing relationship:

My friend has always been there. The last five years have been the most difficult in my life. I have come to accept myself in spite of missing the mark. My self-perception is no longer that of an awful sinner. My friend taught me that I am forgiven and loved by God. Through him I have known total acceptance. It has been a ten-year process to make that change.

The woman was drawn to the stability, openness, and acceptance of this faith mentor. In the interaction of a long-term relationship, her self-perception was transformed so that she could accept and forgive herself.

The interactive nature of social relationships and the dynamic nature of the self was a focal point for the work of George Herbert Mead. Mead saw a person as a product of a social process. One aspect of the full development of the self comes as the result of social interaction in interpersonal relationships.

an individual's self is constituted simply by an organization of the particular attitudes of other individuals toward himself [sic] and

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<sup>6</sup> Leslie D. Weatherhead, The Transforming Friendship (New York: Abingdon, 1931), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, religious professional, age 30.

toward one another in the specific social acts in which he participates with them.<sup>8</sup>

In the examples from the research, both John Wesley and the woman interviewed were affected by influential and transformative faith-mentoring relationships. Their attitudes were reshaped in interaction with their faith mentors. Both acted out of responses from past social interactions as they made choices in the present. And the response of their faith mentors contributed to the creation of their future behavior.

On the other side of faith-mentoring relationships, the influence of faith mentors "is affected by their own self-awareness and intentionality in the interaction process."<sup>9</sup> William Law was aware of the boundaries of his relationship with John Wesley when he refused to take the blame for Wesley's failures. Peter Böhler was very intentional about his influence on Wesley's spiritual journey in the hope that Wesley would join the Moravians. The influential person named by the young woman in her interview offered unconditional acceptance out of his own sense of security.

Through these interpersonal interactions, both John Wesley and the young woman became aware of their own attitudes and behavior, a consciousness that shaped their self-understanding.

The organization of the self is simply the organization, by the individual organism, of the set of attitudes toward its social

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<sup>8</sup> George H. Mead, On Social Psychology (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), 222.

<sup>9</sup> Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 100.



environment and toward itself from the standpoint of that environment.<sup>10</sup>

As a result of new consciousness about themselves, Wesley and the young woman reformed their attitudes. These influential and transformative relationships contributed to their activity of making meaning for both John Wesley and the respondent, thereby facilitating their faith journeys.

### Incarnational

A faith mentor is a co-creator with God who, as a living representative of God's grace, participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons.

Faith-mentoring is relational and incarnational. A faith mentor is a living representative of the love of God in both words and actions. The essence of faith-mentoring is a translucent, self-giving life witnessing to the unconditional acceptance of God for all people. One woman reflected these characteristics in the description of her husband.

He was quiet and unassuming, a tremendous presence in terms of his own faith and life. He was a very childlike person, -- open and excited about life's possibilities. He was not afraid of death. He affirmed my spiritual growth and was supportive of my thoughts of going into ministry. His death was a challenge to my entire faith structure. I have learned to rely much more on faith in God. It is a more personal, easier relationship than before.<sup>11</sup>

God's grace was evident in this joyful, trusting relationship with God. The support and witness of the influential person enabled the woman to clarify her own relationship with God.

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<sup>10</sup> Mead, 169.

<sup>11</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian female, participating lay person, age 43.

Love embodied in relationships is understood here as a gift of God.<sup>12</sup>

This love at work in human relationships creates the incarnational dimension of faith-mentoring which includes embodiment, discernment, and self-giving love.

Embodiment. Maria Harris defined incarnation as embodiment: "a person in whom some quality, attribute, or principle is exhibited in a bodily form, a living representative."<sup>13</sup> Faith mentors participate in relationships embodying God's love. But this embodiment is far from perfect.

We need to begin with an exploration of human love as a manifestation and, usually, a distortion of God's love . . . . God is in the love relationship . . . , but because of our idols, our selfishness and needs, and the injustices of our social and economic systems, God, as the source of love is forgotten . . . . In our impatience, selfish willfulness, arguments, anger, and other imperfections . . . , God is present if we can acknowledge the limits of our ability to love, God's forgiveness and acceptance, and God's promise that human love can be improved.<sup>14</sup>

Embodiment is a unifying image for the involvement of the whole person in faith-mentoring. In a world of dualisms and dichotomies, it is important to note that faith-mentoring is the witness of persons with creative minds and loving hearts in physical bodies. Tilden Edwards commented that "our physical form is an ambiguous embodiment of the Spirit."<sup>15</sup> The implication is that faith mentors lose direction when individual needs, life issues, or human

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<sup>12</sup> Dwayne Huebner, "Religious Education: Practicing the Presence of God," Religious Education 82, no. 4(Fall 1987): 572.

<sup>13</sup> Harris, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Huebner, 574-575.

<sup>15</sup> Tilden Edwards, Living in the Presence: Disciplines for the Spiritual Heart (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 16.

frailties take precedence in their lives. Sometimes faith mentors will be lost in the wilderness. And sometimes they will truly incarnate the love of God.

Discernment. John Wesley's spiritual journey led him to seek out those mentors who would help him discern God's will for his life. Tilden Edwards described some of the challenges of discernment:

The historic practice of "discernment of spirits" rose out of the desire to sort out the movements within us: Which are of God? Which are of constricted ego forces (our own or others)? Which perhaps even are of demonic origin, perhaps disguised as "angels of light"? . . . . In its fullness it goes beyond discernment of moral callings to include our callings to deeper direct communion; it can also simply involve an end-in-itself appreciation of God at work in me or us, without any sense of particular call at this time.<sup>16</sup>

Both of Wesley's mentors shared their discernment of God's will with him. William Law once told Wesley, "You do not understand how God is dealing with you."<sup>17</sup> It was not until many years later that Wesley realized Law was right. When Wesley asked Peter Böhler if he should stop preaching until he had faith, Böhler replied, "Preach the faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."<sup>18</sup>

Discernment was evident in the empirical research data as well. One man described a very brief relationship with a friend dying of cancer. The two served together as camp counselors one summer. The friend was very open and accepting of his worsening physical condition, but indicated he would go on doing what he could while he could.

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<sup>16</sup> Edwards, Living in the Presence, 99.

<sup>17</sup> Wesley, 12:486.

<sup>18</sup> Curnock, 1:442.

When my friend asked me what I was planning to do vocationally, I said, "law school." And he said, "No, the ministry." He is the first person who gave me a vision of ministry that seemed attractive, like something I could do and would be good at, probably what I should be doing. Through his influence I began to see the presence of God in other<sup>19</sup> people more directly; I began to look for signs of God in others.

Discernment helps a faith mentor know how to make connections, to be a living bridge, with another. Wesley's mentors shared insights based on knowing Wesley well. The man's friend experienced something in the brief, intense time of sharing at camp that led him to propose ministry as a vocation.

Huebner would call this activity of discernment "practicing the presence of God."

To be religious is to be with God in the world with others . . . It may be an awareness of God's grace, discipline, redemption, or gifts; a commitment to God's ways, laws, and love; a celebration of God's covenants and mighty deeds; or merely a sense of God's presence and our faithful response. Practicing that presence requires<sup>20</sup> more or less constant awareness of or reference to God in our life.

Many faith mentors live with an awareness of God at work in the world. Through discernment, they facilitate the faith journeys of others as representatives of God's grace, participating in the activity of making meaning in relation to the ultimate.

Self-giving love. To love is to love with one's whole self in consideration of the other. Faith mentors incarnate God's love in non-possessive ways, sharing their lives and insights for the benefit of others. Linell Cady defined love:

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<sup>19</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, religious professional, age 37.

<sup>20</sup> Huebner, 569-570.

To love is to feel and act in a way that takes account of the feelings, interests, and needs of the other . . . . Love is a process of integration whereby the isolation of individuals is overcome through the forging of connections between persons.<sup>21</sup>

One man reflected this isolation when he reported there were few persons in whom he confided. He met his influential person in college and reflected the affirmation that has come through the unconditional love of his friend.

It's a negotiating kind of relationship. We just share feelings and accept it. There is no need to convert each other. He gives me care: "I like everything about you." "There's nothing you can do that would separate us." Through him, I now see God as an accepting person. I cannot be separated from God.<sup>22</sup>

The influential person so influenced this man that he was able to change his image of God. Examples of self-giving love were common in the research data. In the empirical research, a person's descriptive words for God were often used for the influential person as well.

Faith mentors are living representatives of God's love. Edward Robinson called incarnation "enfleshing the word" and emphasized the ongoing need to be aware of this spiritual dimension of life.

that once we accept that this is something that has not been done once and for all but needs to be attempted all over again with every new generation, we must then explore every possible resource open to us; and foremost among these resources will be the works of the contemporary creative imagination. This will not mean turning our backs on the past: a proper understanding of tradition will not lose that perspective. It will mean, though, a

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<sup>21</sup> Linell E. Cady, "Relational Love: A Feminist Christian Vision," *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, eds. Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 140, 141, 142.

<sup>22</sup> Interview respondent, Caucasian male, participating lay person, age 45.

continual readiness to see in forms that will often be puzzling and generally at first sight far from beautiful . . . , a genuine effort on the part of those who have created them to be open to new insights.<sup>23</sup>

Creative imagination, embodiment, discernment, and self-giving love are resources shared by faith mentors as living representatives of God's grace in interpersonal relationships.

### Contextual

A faith mentor is a co-creator with God who, as a living representative of God's grace, **participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons.**

Faith-mentoring is relational, incarnational, and contextual. The context of the mentoring relationship is multi-faceted. Participants bring a variety of life experiences, cultural and ethnic differences, as well as their own personalities to the relationship. Chapter 5 illustrated the ways faith mentors participate in the growth of others in the more immediate settings of faith community, school, work, home, and leisure time activities. While recognizing that persons may be part of numerous groups, the focus here is on the contextual dynamics of being a member of a larger community.

Faith-mentoring and society. Faith-mentoring is affected by the society in which it occurs. George Herbert Mead believed that the self is shaped in interaction with the environment through an act: "an ongoing event that consists of stimulation and response and the results of that response."<sup>24</sup> Individuals' attitudes toward themselves and future behavior are also

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Robinson, "Enfleshing the Word," Religious Education 81, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 366.

<sup>24</sup> Mead, 92.

influenced by the response of society, a second aspect of the full development of the self.

a self is constituted not only by an organization of . . . particular individual attitudes, but by an organization of the social attitudes of the generalized other or the social group as a whole to which he [sic] belongs.<sup>25</sup>

The social attitude of the generalized other is communicated to individuals from birth through the responses of others in language and actions.<sup>26</sup>

"Culture as mentor" was Sharon Parks' term for society's dynamic cultivation of growth.

A "culture" is composed of the forms of life by which a people cultivate and maintain a sense of meaning, giving shape and significance to their experience. Culture is dependent upon the capacity of human beings to learn and to transmit learning to succeeding generations.<sup>27</sup>

Culture becomes mentor for persons in their search for meaning while directing the growth of individuals in socially acceptable and appropriate ways.

In this nurturing relationship with society, persons organize attitudes about themselves by assuming the roles of others, taking on the attitude of the generalized other toward themselves.<sup>28</sup> Persons in relationships see themselves as others see them. A woman who described herself as "quiet and retiring without much self-confidence" illustrated the transformation that occurred when the response of another contradicted her self-perception.

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<sup>25</sup> Mead, 222.

<sup>26</sup> Mead, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Parks, 177.

<sup>28</sup> Mead, 102.

My friend was exciting, active, always doing something different. We were in business together. He just assumed I could do whatever I wanted to do. He helped me look at myself and accept my faults as part of me. He gave me self-confidence. He created interest in things to do for the business. I did things I would never have done on my own. When I<sup>29</sup> decided to go back to school, he made me believe I could do it.

The influential person raised the woman's awareness of her own behavior so that she could reconstruct her own self-perception and try new behaviors.

For Mead, this forming and re-forming activity is learning because

a human can get into his [sic] activities and break them up, giving attention to specific elements, holding the responses that answer to these particular stimuli, and then combining them to build up another act.<sup>30</sup>

Mead's theory illumines the complexity of faith-mentoring. Faith mentors incarnate God's grace and participate in the activity of making meaning through interpersonal relationships. And yet, as members of a particular society, faith mentors represent the response of society in social interactions.

But a faith-mentoring relationship is not one way. Faith mentors are being shaped in the interaction as well. Parks concluded:

In the interdependence of meaning-making, the mentor needs the protege as much as the protege needs the mentor. The generativity of the adult is dependent upon meaningful, faithful connection with the next generation. To accompany the young adult in faith can mean a reawakening of one's own potential for compassion, excellence and vocation.<sup>31</sup>

Both participants in a faith-mentoring relationship have been formed by their own life experiences in a particular society, and each influences the other's faith journey.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview Respondent, Caucasian female, previously-churched, age 52.

<sup>30</sup> Mead, 173.

<sup>31</sup> Parks, 205.



Faith-mentoring and community. Within a society are numerous communities, and faith mentors have been shaped by these communities. The term community is often used to describe a special quality of relationship, but it is also used to designate a structure, a group of people.<sup>32</sup> The Whiteheads defined community as the social structure that lies on a continuum between a primary group and a formal association. A primary group like the family is found in the more private part of one's life and is characterized by intimate relationships and limited social interactions.<sup>33</sup> Much of what occurs in this private realm receives no public recognition. In contrast, formal association (like a business relationship) is found in the public realm. The community stands between the primary group and the formal association. It contains aspects of both the private and public parts of life and can serve as the link between these two realms. Characteristics of community are a common orientation toward what is significant, some agreement about values, a commitment to common goals, opportunities for personal sharing, and agreed-upon definitions.<sup>34</sup>

A faith community is one of the communities in which faith-mentoring occurs. A faith community is not only a bridge between the private and public, but also a mediator of dreams.

A crucial function of a faith community is that of **traditioning** -- handing on . . . hopes and values. In this activity a community of faith mediates its inherited values and its deepest convictions to

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<sup>32</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 67.

<sup>34</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 50-55.

its members. It hands on the [faith] dream.<sup>35</sup>

According to the Whiteheads, faith formation occurs when three dreams intersect: the individual's dream that is nurtured into vocation; the dreams that surround persons in their environment, what others hope for them; and the collective dream of the reign of God in a universal community.<sup>36</sup> When a faith community clarifies its own vision and vocation, the work of mediation begins. A collective vision is clarified and modified by the dreams of individuals, just as individual dreams are clarified and modified by a collective vision.<sup>37</sup> In the end, the dream depends on the dreamers, and God gives imagination to create the vision.<sup>38</sup>

A faith mentor is a mediator of dreams within the context of a faith community. A faith mentor nurtures an individual's dream into vocation. Accompanying another in a process of self-discovery facilitates the creation and living out of a dream. Faith mentors create an environment of hope bringing their gifts of imagination into a relationship. A faith mentor encourages the interaction of an individual dream with the collective vision of a faith community. When a faith community "loses its vision, it begins to forfeit its function as mediator of dreams."<sup>39</sup> When faith mentors lose touch with their own vision or the larger vision of a faith community, they can no longer function as mediators of the dream.

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<sup>35</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 89.

<sup>36</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 89.

<sup>37</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 101.

<sup>38</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 106.

<sup>39</sup> Whitehead and Whitehead, 99.

Faith-mentoring is multi-dimensional: relational (co-creators with God), incarnational (living representatives of God's grace), and contextual (participates in the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons). The focus of faith-mentoring relationships is the relational, vocational, and spiritual growth of other persons. When persons are enabled to claim the power of their own being and use the gifts they have been given, the ongoingness of God's creating activity is enhanced.

### Metaphors of Faith-Mentoring

The possibilities for faith-mentoring relationships are endless. Each person brings a unique personality to faith-mentoring. No two faith mentors are exactly alike. Each is being shaped by God through life experience. To illustrate some possibilities, three metaphors of faith-mentoring are described here. The metaphors are presented with illustrative stories of persons who themselves could be identified as prophet, clown, and wise woman.

#### Prophet

The first metaphor of faith-mentoring is prophet, a person who speaks for God or is divinely inspired.<sup>40</sup> An example of a prophetic faith mentor is a woman of vision named Jarena Lee. She was born of African-American free parents in February of 1783 and hired out as a servant girl at the age of seven.<sup>41</sup> Nothing more is known about Jarena's experiences in childhood.

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<sup>40</sup> "Prophet," Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College ed., 1954.

<sup>41</sup> All of the information about Jarena Lee comes from her autobiography in William L. Andrews, ed. Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 4-7; 25-49.

When she was twenty-one, Jarena was converted to Christianity and began to discover a call to exhortation. Her spiritual struggle continued after conversion. Jarena's increasing spiritual growth and involvement in the African Methodist Episcopal Church led her to seek permission to preach in 1811. The request was denied. Of this experience, Jarena Lee wrote in her journal:

If then, to preach the gospel, by the gift of heaven, comes by inspiration solely, is God straitened; must he take the man exclusively? May he [sic] not, did he not, and can he not inspire a female to preach the simple story of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, and accompany it too, with power to the sinner's heart. As for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labour according to what I have received, in his vineyard. If he has not, how could he consistently bear testimony in favour of my poor labours, in awakening and converting sinners?<sup>42</sup>

Jarena married in 1811, and several years later tragically lost five members of her family. The widow and mother of two young children was on her own. Jarena still felt called to preach. After interrupting a sermon with her own extemporaneous exhortation in 1819, she was granted her request.

Jarena Lee itinerated over many miles throughout the northeastern and middle-Atlantic states preaching to both black and white congregations. In 1833, she engaged an editor to prepare her journal for publication and with her own money it was published. "Jarena Lee became an autobiographer out of a conviction that the record of God's work in and through her would help lead others to Christ."<sup>43</sup> She was a prophet guided by God to participate in the spiritual growth of others through her gift of exhortation. Her witness

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<sup>42</sup> Andrews, 36-37.

<sup>43</sup> Andrews, 6.

was prophetic. What she did was certainly in contradiction to the cultural and religious expectations of her time. In addition to preaching and advocating for the rights of other women to preach, she joined the American Antislavery Society to protest the inhumanity of slavery.<sup>44</sup> Jarena Lee preached and worked for her vision of a world that respected the dignity of all persons.

Jarena, as preacher and minister, was a witness to the fact that God calls all kinds of people, including those who are female, black, and poor with little formal education. Through her, persons heard the message of God's redeeming love and were converted. By sharing the story of her growing identity as Christian, Jarena Lee provided the vehicle by which other persons could come to a Christian identity. This is the potential of faith mentor as prophet, the one who proclaims the gospel and walks in love with others on their faith journeys.

### Clown

A clown in ministry is a second metaphor for faith-mentoring. Circus clowns sometimes play tricks on unsuspecting members of the audience, but clowns in ministry seek to bring joy to persons met on the way. The clown witnesses to God's grace by her or his acceptance and love. Clowns seek to share the story of a faith community in ways that open new avenues of understanding. The following example of ministry through street clowning illustrates how faith-mentoring can occur in a brief encounter.

Bill Mathews, a well-known clown, related this story about his

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<sup>44</sup> Andrews, 6.

experience of ministry through street clowning.<sup>45</sup> The clown sat down at the opposite end of a city bench in the same position as a man who was obviously discouraged: head down, elbow on knee, and chin in hand. After a few seconds, the man looked at him and said, "Lost my job today." The clown nodded and looked sad. They sat together in silence for a few seconds. Then the clown sat upright slowly and deliberately made an obscene gesture. The man sat up and repeated the gesture, smiling as the clown walked away. Someone heard the pain of the man on the bench and identified with that pain. An encounter of less than a minute let that man know someone heard and someone cared.

Bill Mathews as clown connected with the life story of the man who lost his job. The clown heard the man's pain and provided an opportunity for him to express his anger. Bill never knew what happened to the man he met, but through his presence, God's presence was represented.

In the name of God I am here for you. I give my attention to you and to our being together as a representative of God's love and care for you. I am a broken, human expression of that love, but you have my attention and care while we are together and my prayers while we are apart.<sup>46</sup>

Even in the briefest encounters, healing can occur, but the faith mentor as care-giver and clown is totally dependent on God. With God's grace the clown becomes the best friend of those who are isolated and hurting, accepting them as they are. In this trustworthy relationship, persons are able to break through the walls that surround them to find new hope and healing.

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<sup>45</sup> Private discussion at a clown workshop, Kansas City Missouri, April 1982.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald G. May, Care of Mind, Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Direction (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 99.

Healing is a restoration to wholeness, a return to our original goodness and completeness. And so it is a sign of the power and presence of God . . . . Friendship makes us more complete.<sup>47</sup> Why shouldn't friends heal one another and return to wholeness?

Whether friendship is a momentary encounter or a life-long relationship, faith-mentoring occurs through these relationships. Faith mentor as friend brings healing through God's grace.

### Wise Woman

A wise woman is one who has gifts of discernment and wisdom. She understands the rhythms of life. She tells stories that shape women's lives. A wise woman lives the truth that is inside her being. Paula Gunn Allen described the Laguna wise woman:

In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into the present among those peoples of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition. To her we owe our lives, and from her comes our ability to endure, regardless of the concerted assaults on our, on Her, being, for the past five hundred years of colonization. She is the Old Woman who tends the fires of life. She is the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection. She is the Eldest God, the one who Remembers and Re-members; and through the history of the past five hundred years has taught us bitterness and helpless rage, we endure into the present, alive, certain of our significance, certain<sup>48</sup> of her centrality, her identity as the Sacred Hoop of Be-ing.

The stories of the Laguna wise woman provide cyclical and rhythmical imagery for the ongoing identity of her people. The wise woman tends the fires of life, weaves interconnecting relationships, and re-members the story of

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<sup>47</sup> Don Kimball, Power and Presence: A Theology of Relationships (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 64.

<sup>48</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (Boston: Beacon, 1986), 11.

her people. She teaches that "all life is a circle, and everything has its place in it."<sup>49</sup>

One important story from the Laguna Pueblo is the story of Allen's mother -- a wise woman and faith mentor, who shaped her life through story.

My mother told me stories all the time, though I often did not recognize them as that. My mother told me stories about cooking and childbearing; she told me stories about menstruation and pregnancy; she told me stories about gods and heroes, about fairies and elves, about goddesses and spirits; she told me stories about the land and the sky, about cats and dogs, about snakes and spiders; . . . she told me stories about going to dances and getting married; . . . she told me stories about herself, about her mother, about her grandmother. She told me stories about grieving and laughing, about thinking and doing; she told me stories about school and about people; . . . she told me European stories and Laguna stories; she told me Catholic stories and Presbyterian stories; she told me city stories and country stories; she told me political stories and religious stories. She told me stories about living and stories about dying. And in all of those stories she told me **who I was, who I was supposed to be, whom I came from, and who would follow me.** In this way she taught me the meaning of the words she said, that all life is a circle and everything has a place within it. That's what she said and what <sup>50</sup>she showed me in the things she did and the way she lives.

The stories told by the mother, as well as what she did and how she lived, nurtured an identity for the daughter. The mother created a web of images around her child through story. Just as the wise woman tends the fire and tells the story over and over so it will never die, so faith mentors tend the story of faith.

Some of the most valued people in a community or society provide the others with images that become symbolic of common experience and give us a new language for understanding and

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<sup>49</sup> Allen, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Allen, 46 (boldface added).



telling the common history.<sup>51</sup>

Jarena Lee preached the gospel and published part of her religious journal to guide others in their journeys. The clown's friendship was witness to the dependability of God who accepts persons as they are, hurting and rejoicing with them. And the wise native woman spun a web of imagery around her daughter, connecting her with those who came before and those yet to come. These three persons served as faith mentors out of their own unique identities and personalities, using God-given abilities.

While it has been demonstrated that God works through faith mentors beyond the boundaries of a faith community, the focus of this work now turns to how a faith community nurtures and supports faith mentors like the prophet, clown, and wise woman.

#### The Role of a Faith Community in Faith-Mentoring

Faith-mentoring occurs as God acts in interpersonal relationships. A faith community cannot create faith mentors, but a faith community can create an environment which facilitates faith-mentoring. A supportive climate for faith-mentoring is based on the affirmation that God works through persons. An accepting environment encourages persons to walk side-by-side in their faith journeys. A supportive climate in a faith community frees persons to open their lives to God, thereby becoming potential vehicles for God's grace at work in the world.

To recognize the possibility that God works in all persons is risky. As individuals are heard into speech, they claim their right to shape the message

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<sup>51</sup> Linda Clark, Marian Ronan, and Eleanor Walker, Image-breaking, Image-building (New York: Pilgrim, 1981), 4.

and mission of a faith community. But a commitment to be open to the work of God through interpersonal relationships makes the development of a ministry of faith-mentoring possible. For a faith community willing to make this commitment and to take this risk, rewards will come through the joy of sharing faith journeys. Five activities for developing a ministry of faith-mentoring are considered here: identifying faith mentors, empowering faith mentors, equipping faith mentors, creating space where persons can meet, and supporting faith mentors.

### Identifying Faith Mentors

A creative awareness of the possibility for all persons to serve as mediators of God's grace challenges a faith community to identify faith mentors who are readily available like the prophet, the clown, and the wise woman. Jarena Lee's call was evident in what she did and said. She interrupted a sermon to preach spontaneously, and she asked for permission to live out her call. The clown appeared and disappeared quickly. Only upon reflection would a person discover something special had happened in the meeting with the clown. The wise woman of the Laguna Pueblo was a faith mentor by being who she was. Faith mentors can be identified by a faith community that comes to see God in each person. At least three concurrent strategies are involved in the identification process: listening, observing and asking.

Listening. A faith community looking for faith mentors listens to the stories of persons of all ages, to males and females, to married and single, to persons from different ethnic backgrounds, to parents, to the widowed, to children and youth, to women who work, to men and women who farm, to apartment dwellers -- listens to anyone who will share. Faith mentors are

identified through their own stories. Sometimes this means hearing what is uncomfortable, unwanted, or threatening. Jarena Lee discussed her call to preach with several persons, but it took eight years for her call to be recognized by her faith community. Hearing a variety of stories not only expands the opportunities for identifying faith mentors, but increases awareness that God is working in persons' lives.

Faith mentors may be found in unexpected places. Persons excluded from the fellowship of a faith community also nurture faith journeys, but their stories are rarely heard. The unemployed, ethnic persons of color, street people, gays and lesbians, the poor, and persons with special needs are often the silent ones. Maria Harris affirmed that those without power are the ones who must be heard.

the educational task of listening is primarily important for those who do most of the speechifying in the world . . . refusing to be silent is the task of the student, the learner. This task takes shape in finding one's own voice, the voices of others, and the voices of entire peoples.<sup>52</sup>

When the silent ones are invited to speak, they claim new dignity for themselves as God's people. When a faith community listens, persons with special gifts are liberated; faith mentors are identified.

Observing. Persons also speak through their actions. Those seeking to identify faith mentors watch what people are already doing, especially those who are doing things for others. The Laguna daughter learned much about the meaning of life by watching her mother and the way she lived. Faith mentors are found when observers watch persons with the question in mind: How is God

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<sup>52</sup> Harris, 104.

at work through the life of this person? Who runs errands, makes calls, and provides transportation without being asked? Who enjoys visiting with others? Who takes time to stop and chat with children? Which persons are clearly living out their faith?

Faith mentors are found not only in the adult population. Observers can also note the interests of children and youth. What are their favorite subjects at school? What musical instruments do they play? Which ones relate well to a variety of persons? Which ones provide leadership in their classes or fellowship groups?

Awareness of persons who are involved in social issues, the ones who fight for justice, also reveals faith mentors. Who works for political campaigns? Who marches in demonstrations? Who testifies before the legislature? Who exhibits integrity in business practices? Who hires women and persons from various ethnic groups? Who provides leadership for other voluntary associations? Watching what persons already do provides information about skills and additional support for faith-mentoring.

Asking. A third strategy for identifying faith mentors is to ask for references. If the man who lost his job, or the daughter of the wise woman, were asked to name persons who had facilitated their faith journeys, faith mentors would be identified.

William Willimon and his Christian education committee asked youth and adults of his congregation, "Who of this church's adults would be especially good in helping our youth deepen their faith?" The list of names gathered was confidential. The pastor selected twelve persons and asked them to serve as

mentors or guides for confirmation class members.<sup>53</sup>

The Division of Diaconal Ministry of the United Methodist Church needed mentors to accompany candidates for diaconal ministry on their faith journeys. Annual Conferences were asked to identify persons with specific skills to serve as mentors. These persons were invited to mentor trainings focusing on spiritual formation and skill development in order to prepare them for this special ministry.

Different approaches to asking are evident in each of these examples. In the first approach, persons were asked to name influential persons who witnessed to their faith by the way they lived. Some of these persons may not be known to a faith community. In the second approach, one asks the same question about persons who are known in a specific faith community. The third approach involved looking for persons with specific skills. Part of the asking may be waiting, waiting for the story to form, waiting to hear others into speech.<sup>54</sup>

Identifying faith mentors involves strategies of listening, observing, and asking. By listening to the stories of others, by observing behavior, and by asking for persons who live their faith, a faith community identifies faith mentors.

### Empowering Faith Mentors

Faith mentors are empowered through identifying, naming, and sharing their gifts. Persons who have discovered their own gifts and find that a faith

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<sup>53</sup> Willimon, "Taking Confirmation Out of the Classroom," 271.

<sup>54</sup> "Hearing others to speech" is taken from the work of Nelle Morton, The Journey is Home (Beacon: Beacon, 1985), 125.

community has no use for their particular abilities and interests may not remain. Some, like Jarena Lee, persist in the face of early discouragement. Some, like the clown and the wise woman, will find ways to share their gifts with or without the support of a faith community. Living out one's faith is a gift to be celebrated. By helping members of faith communities recognize and affirm the gifts of others, an environment is created where faith-mentoring relationships can grow.

Facilitating the sharing of gifts does not take place exclusively within a faith community. Even the silent ones have something to share with the faith community.

The silent are carrying out the human work that keeps the world going. The silent cook the world's meals, dry the world's tears, heal the world's cuts and bruises, make the world's beds -- for those who have them --<sup>55</sup> clean the world's clothes and dishes, and wipe the world's noses.

If all persons are potential representatives of God's grace, then witness to what God has given appears in all of life. A faith community can intentionally build a network of faith-mentoring that reaches far beyond its boundaries into the world by affirming and facilitating the sharing of gifts.

An example of this kind of empowerment comes from a downtown church that gave the silent ones an opportunity to speak and to share. Six years ago church doors in Kansas City, Missouri, opened to homeless persons. Out of listening to the stories of the homeless, a privately-funded ministry called Re-Start has evolved. What is unique about this particular ministry is the way persons are treated with dignity. The importance of language and imagery is

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<sup>55</sup> Harris, 104.

evident in this ministry when one finds the sign "Hotel" on two floors of their inner city building. All who stay at the center are called guests. The director of Re-Start nurtures and proclaims a vision of the biblical imagery of hospitality. All who come for assistance are served.

Re-Start is an environment ripe for faith-mentoring because the director and staff live with a vision of a universal community in which all persons have dignity and worth. The witness of God's grace through their lives affects those around them. The guests, as members of the Board, have helped shaped this expanding ministry. The silent ones have spoken; their gifts are shared and accepted. Re-Start witnesses to what the power of God can do through faith-mentoring in a seemingly impossible situation.

#### Equipping Faith Mentors

Equipping faith mentors is synonymous with spiritual formation. Faith mentors are persons who find meaning for their lives in relation to the ultimate. The nurturing of the spiritual journey is a primary contribution of a faith community. Bible study and prayer are foundational for faith mentors to know their story of faith so well that, like the wise woman, it becomes part of who they are. The particular shape a faith story has taken in the historical tradition of a faith community contributes to the self-awareness of faith mentors. In addition, practice of other spiritual disciplines equips faith mentors with resources to support their calling as living representatives of God's grace.

Discernment is a resource cultivated by reflecting on how God is working in one's life through challenges, turning points, and relationships. Faith mentors are faced with the dilemma of how to discern the will of God. Parker Palmer recommended the Quaker practice of a clearness committee for helping persons to use their own discernment in making decisions.

Each of us has an inner, divine light that gives us the guidance we need but is often obscured by sundry forms of inner and outer interference. The function of the clearness committee is not to give advice or alter and "fix" people but to help people remove obstacles and discover the divine assistance that is within. If belief in the inner wisdom is not present in the group, the clearness committee might become an opportunity for manipulation. But rooted in that conviction, the clearness committee can help people discover their own God-given leadings and callings through silence, through questioning, through listening, through prayer.<sup>56</sup>

Discernment is developed in community and helps faith mentors know that the workings of God are not always immediately apparent. The task is to live a life of faith and to use the resource of discernment to enhance the spiritual journeys of others.

Communication skills are developed by knowing when and how to share one's own story. Reflective listening for ideas and feelings expressed by another person is important. A silent clown cannot smother a person's story with words. A clown can recognize pain in non-verbal ways while healing takes its natural course. How does a faith mentor listen for what a person is not saying? How much should a faith mentor say about what is heard? How does one know what to tell and what to let persons discover themselves? These communication issues are part of the preparation for those who are open to mediating the faith for others.

Introducing human development literature would also be helpful to faith mentors so that they might recognize growth processes in another's spiritual journey. Stages of moral, cognitive, psychosocial and faith development can provide markers for growth and help explain how life unfolds in different times

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<sup>56</sup> For a more detailed account of how a clearness committee works, see Parker Palmer, "The Clearness Committee: A Way of Discernment," Weavings 3, no. 4 (July/August 1988): 38.



and in different ways. While developmental literature is helpful in understanding growth processes, it is not intended to provide criteria for valuing one person's growth more than another's. The role of faith mentors is to accompany persons on their journeys, not to short-circuit growth by solving their problems, denying their pain, or judging their developmental level.

Information from the empirical research on influential relationships (Chapter 2) could be used in equipping faith mentors. Family relationships were the form of influential relationship most often cited by non-Caucasian ethnic groups, previously-churched persons, and lay persons (Table 3). How can a faith community affirm and prepare family members who serve as faith mentors. Equipping helping professionals and friends is also important. Jarena Lee, as a helping professional, was provided support by her faith community in her spiritual journey. Training for clown ministry not only includes mime and make-up, but also requires consideration of what it means to be in ministry as friend.

Introducing the hazards of faith-mentoring is important for equipping faith mentors. Psychoanalytic theory provides some guidance in recognizing an unhealthy relationship (Chapter 3). Faith mentors need to know when a referral should be made, as well as what community resources are available when need arises.

Finally, one of the most important resources for equipping faith mentors may be the creative use of solitude. A faith community provides opportunities for faith mentors to be apart in time and space. Group or individual spiritual retreats are one example. Recognizing one's own rhythm of immersion in ministry and withdrawal for renewal is a resource that prevents burn-out and loss of direction. Persons who offer their gifts for the benefit of others need time apart for spiritual and personal renewal.

Equipping persons for faith-mentoring is no small task. Yet God is already at work in persons' lives. Faith mentors are searching for the ultimate meaning of life. A faith community contributes to the developing self-awareness and spirituality of faith mentors who can then offer themselves for the growth of other persons.

#### Creating Space Where Persons Can Meet

For Parker Palmer, community "is a continual process of unmasking, of having to let go of illusions about ourselves and others."<sup>57</sup> And persons want to do that unmasking in the privacy and intimacy of family, not in public. Persons tend to think of faith community as family and resist welcoming strangers into its midst. But Palmer's vision is different:

If [a faith community] could become such a community -- a place where people confront the stranger in each other and in themselves, and still know that they are members one of another -- it would help people enter the public sphere . . . . Not only would the [faith community] be livelier, it would also exemplify the quality most vital to the renewal of public life -- the capacity of a common commitment to hold us together despite diversity and conflict.<sup>58</sup>

A faith community that is intentional about a ministry of faith-mentoring will provide space where persons can meet.

The usual practice of segregating persons into limited age groupings in faith communities results in the loss of interaction between generations and misses a prime opportunity for faith-mentoring. The lack of intergenerational exposure is important because the society surrounding a faith community has

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<sup>57</sup> Parker Palmer, The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 124.

<sup>58</sup> Palmer, The Company of Strangers, 125.

changed. The shape of the family has changed. For some persons, extended families are unknown or geographically distant. At one time in U.S. history, families turned to their faith community to be the primary source of social contact and fellowship, and young persons found their identities within that faith community. Now competing communities and activities often distract persons from participating in a faith community.

A secular context requires a different approach to ministry, an approach in which imagery and story become even more important. For example, one congregation whose members were of Asian, Hispanic, Armenian, Filipino, European, and Caribbean heritages invited persons to share how they became part of a faith community.<sup>59</sup> Worship was a time for story. Some had come to a faith community as children in other countries, and some had just recently found a faith community. The congregation not only became acquainted with one another, but came to celebrate the gifts that each person brought. Contact made as a result of the sharing led to faith-mentoring relationships.

Designated mentoring is growing more common. Faith mentors are designated as spiritual directors for persons wanting to concentrate on their spiritual journeys, as sponsors for new members of a faith community, as counseling teachers with new church school teachers, as grandparents or big sisters and brothers for the children, as nursery home visitors with new mothers, or as confirmation guides with young people. Assignments for

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<sup>59</sup> The author is grateful to the members of Los Feliz United Methodist Church of Hollywood, California, for their witness of God's grace through faith-mentoring relationships.

designated faith-mentoring need to be re-negotiated when relationships are outgrown or incompatible.

A faith community participates in the work of God by identifying, empowering, and equipping faith mentors, and then providing space where persons can meet. These activities become part of a support system for faith-mentoring.

### Supporting Faith Mentors

Spiritual support is a primary resource of a faith community. Affirmation of the ministry of faith-mentoring in worship raises awareness and support. Community prayer for those who serve as faith mentors is important. Sharing groups for faith mentors provide additional spiritual support. Those who are striving to live a Christian life on behalf of others need an opportunity to be part of a small group in which experiences can be shared and God's will discerned.

Accountability goes hand-in-hand with support. In discussing transformative education, Robert Evans stated:

A supportive community, especially a community of faith, allows persons to discern and respond to the demands of a biblical reversal for their own lives and institutions with a degree of honesty and integrity that would be impossible alone. . . .

However, to sustain the transformation the community of support must also be a community of accountability . . . . The process of establishing covenants of accountability that set forth achievable goals for moving toward redistribution, repositioning, and reevaluation is essential to sustaining transformation. The ability of the community to acknowledge failure, grant forgiveness, and renegotiate<sup>60</sup> covenants is also critical to the process of transformation.

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<sup>60</sup> Evans, Evans and Kennedy, 278.

A faith community affirms the process of spiritual growth and witness through opportunities for deepening spirituality, developing skills, and growing in self-understanding. Scripture and/or a historical tradition provide a touchstone for the interpretation of life experience. Participating in a faith community protects a faith mentor from individualism and isolation. Part of the covenant between faith mentors and a faith community is the commitment to continue working together through whatever situation arises. Times of conflict can be viewed as opportunities to grow, as faith mentors and a faith community work together to resolve the issues.

The guidance of spiritual leaders is a contributing factor to the development of a ministry of faith-mentoring. For example, a minister who is available to faith mentors for encouragement, counsel and resourcing becomes spiritual guide to faith mentors. Support for a ministry of faith-mentoring requires a major commitment on the part of a faith community and its spiritual leader(s). Creating structures to provide support, accountability and spiritual guidance are critical for the empowerment of faith mentors.

### Conclusion

The role of a faith community in creating a ministry of faith-mentoring is to identify, to equip, and to empower faith mentors by creating space for relationships and providing spiritual support and accountability. In order for faith-mentoring to occur, space needs to be created where persons meet. Since most faith-mentoring relationships are established informally, opportunities for contact are necessary. A faith community creates an interconnecting web of relationships across ages, races, and classes by intentionally bringing persons together in a variety of ways.

Faith-mentoring occurs in a faith community that listens to all persons, especially those outside itself. Hearing persons to speech liberates potential faith mentors and shapes the direction of a faith community's life and mission.

Faith-mentoring is enhanced in an environment that celebrates the discovery of new gifts. Encouraging persons to claim their identities and gifts may have unexpected, and sometimes unwanted, results. It is not uncommon for previously-churched persons to express hurt that their gifts were not welcome within a faith community. An important calling of a faith community is to provide ways for persons to share their God-given abilities.

The use of imagery and story effectively communicates a faith story. A need exists for common language and symbols, especially for those persons who have not been raised in a faith community. Not only can faith mentors use these resources effectively, but a faith community clarifies its own identity and mission through imagery and story.

Faith mentors function where persons are. Jarena Lee traveled many miles to preach the gospel. The clown went onto the streets to minister. The wise woman ministered in her home. The scope of a faith community's ministry is broadened by empowering persons to serve as faith mentors wherever their lives take them.

Persons need space, intimacy, and acceptance in a nurturing relationship. By claiming all persons as children of God and potential mediators of the faith, a faith community accepts those persons who are excluded from that fellowship. This acceptance creates the possibility of renewal of a faith community itself.

The practice of ministry is reshaped and renewed in light of the contributions of faith-mentoring. More persons participate in proclaiming,

healing, and educating ministries. The separation and hierarchy of the functions of ministry are no longer relevant in a faith community where all are ministers.

Finally, faith-mentoring becomes an intentional practice of ministry only when a faith community focuses on God at work in the world. A risk is involved in freeing persons to witness to God's grace in their lives. Persons may discover gifts that are beyond the conventions of a faith community. But the sharing of these gifts brings new life to individuals and to faith communities. Through this empowerment, a faith community grows toward a universal community, the reign of God.

The Reign of God requires a new understanding of power that rests unequivocally on trust in God, a total dependence on God's care and mercy as the ultimate foundation, not only of security, but of life itself. Strangely enough, power is rightly exercised only when it empowers others to maximize their humanity. Power is not in holding but in relinquishing. This view of power from below measures its effectiveness in terms of service rendered, not service acquired. This power is shared with love and seeks the wholeness, humanization, and emancipation of the neighbor . . . the measure of power from below is the mutual and reciprocal enhancement of the community.<sup>61</sup>

The metaphors of prophet, clown, and wise woman provided a glimpse of the wholeness that comes when persons are empowered to claim the gifts of their humanity. The promise of faith-mentoring is that persons will affirm God incarnate in themselves and in others, and then participate more fully in the practice of ministry. Creating a ministry of faith-mentoring has the potential of renewing a faith community through the recovery of a consciousness of the power of God at work in relationships.

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<sup>61</sup> Evans, Evans, and Kennedy, 272-273.

This book ends where it began -- with the conviction that faith is mediated through interpersonal relationships. The idea for the project was born out of gratitude and love for those who, like God, have given so much unmerited love. The research grew out of wondering about influential relationships. But the book ends with a new beginning, a vision of faith mentors participating in the creation of a universal community where each person mediates God's grace for others. Faith-mentoring challenges faith communities to recognize that God is incarnated in all persons. Affirming and accepting persons empowers them to claim the gifts of God and to join faith communities in moving toward a universal community of love and justice. Some of the border pieces of the puzzle have come together and the picture that appears is a great banquet where all are celebrating their ministry as one.

And then all that has divided us will merge  
 And then compassion will be wedded to power  
 And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind  
 And then both men and women will be gentle  
 And then both women and men will be strong  
 And then no person will be subject to another's will  
 And then all will be rich and free and varied  
 And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many  
 And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance  
 And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old  
 And then all will nourish the young  
 And then all will cherish life's creatures  
 And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth  
 And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 256.



# Appendix 1 Interview Questionnaire<sup>1</sup>

## Respondent

First Name                      Last Initial                      Age   PC   PL   RP  
Gender                      Ethnicity

(We are going to talk about a relationship in your life that has been important to you and has influenced you in some special way. Your important person could be someone like a friend, neighbor, relative, co-worker, boss, counselor, advisor, teacher, helper, god-parent, or minister. It could be a person you talk to when you have a major decision to make or a problem to solve. It could be a person from your past or from your present, a long-term or a short-term relationship, positive or negative influence. We will start with three general questions.)

1. At this point in your life, what kinds of things are really important to you?
  2. Do you consider yourself to be a religious person? How did you come to see yourself that way?
  3. Are you registered to vote? Would you describe your political beliefs? (What criteria or values do you use when making decisions at the polls?)
- (Now our attention will turn to the person who has been influential in your life. Do you have someone in mind?)
4. Describe the person. What qualities or characteristics identifies her/him?
  5. When were you last with this person? What was the reason for being together? Describe what it is like to be with this person.
  6. Have you ever disagreed? What issues cause disagreement between you?
  7. What does this person do for you? give to you? teach you?
  8. Give a specific example of when/how this person influenced you. (It could be an incident, idea or attitude.) What changes have you seen in yourself because of your relationship with this person?

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<sup>1</sup> Words in parentheses are approximately what the interviewer said. Questions 12-13 were added after 31 interviews were completed; number 14 was added after 55 interviews were completed.

9. Has the relationship changed in any way since it began?
10. Has this person influenced your relationship with God or religious life? In what way?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this person that I did not ask you about?
12. How did you meet? (Who initiated the relationship?)
13. Why did you select this person over others you could have talked about?
14. Could you have the same kind of relationship with a female/male (whichever not chosen)?

Influential Person

Age                      Gender                      Ethnicity

How long have you known this person?

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